



DIPLOMACY TRAINING PROGRAM

AFFILIATED WITH THE FACULTY OF LAW AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES
A training program for peoples of the Asia-Pacific region

Building Human Rights Advocacy Capacity for the People from Burma in Australia

**Held in partnership with the Joint Action Committee for a Democratic Burma
(JACDB) Sydney Branch**

**July-December 2007
Project Report:**

1. Summary:

'I am hungry for knowledge of how to help my people and I am very appreciative for this opportunity to learn'

Participant Evaluation

From July 2007 to December 2007, the Diplomacy Training Program (DTP) conducted a special capacity building program for advocates from Burma living in Australia. The Diplomacy Training Program has had a long association with the human rights movement in Burma – and in particular with the activists forced into exile and living in refugee camps mainly on the Thai/Burma border. This relationship goes back to the inclusion of Burmese human rights advocates on DTP's first courses in the early 1990's – soon after the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi was overthrown by the Burmese military.

This project was developed through consultations with the Sydney-based Burmese communities, DTP alumni and the Joint Action Committee for a Democratic Burma (JACDB). DTP would like to thank those members of JACDB for the opportunity to build this partnership with the people of Burma in Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne.

The program was developed in response to the continuing gross violations of human rights in Burma, the need for a more effective international response to these violations, and the commitment of advocates from Burma in Australia to work together for more effective human rights action.

The program adapted DTP's methodology to the situation of advocates living in Australia. It was decided that a non-residential program held over a number of Saturdays (fortnightly) would be most accessible to the range of community advocates who could benefit. It was also agreed that in addition to human rights law and the UN system, the program would include a focus on the realities and challenges facing advocates in Australia – how the Australian government works, the role of MPs, the Australian media, fundraising and outreach to the broader community.

There was very strong interest in the course and 35 participants began the course on July 14th and completed the course in December. There were participants from Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne. It was a significant feature of the course that participants came from many of the different ethnic communities and identities that make up Burma – the Karen, Mon, Shan and Rohingya.

The course coincided with a renewed international focus on Burma in response to the mass protests of Buddhist monks and others, and the subsequent and continuing violent crackdown by the military regime. The course participants were significantly involved in efforts to give support to these protests and to bring international pressure to bear on the military regime. The course responded to their very real needs and challenges.

DTP would like to register its deep appreciation and gratitude to the trainers who generously donated their time and shared their expertise and knowledge. Generous in-kind support was provided by Caritas Australia and financial support was provided by Oxfam Australia. The program was coordinated by Elizabeth Newell for the Diplomacy Training Program, and would not have been possible without her enthusiasm, dedication and hard work. Liz in turn was sustained and motivated through the project by the commitment of the participants and their communities.

2. Program Objectives and the Evaluation Process

The program's specific objectives and an assessment of the extent to which they were met are examined throughout this report. The objectives were:

- To develop the skills and capacity of the people of Burma human rights advocates living in Australia to be able to participate effectively in advocacy on Burmese human rights issues
- To enable Australian-based people from Burma to engage effectively with the Australian government and community in relation to human rights issues in Burma and regarding Burmese refugees.
- To facilitate increased networking between Australian-based people from Burma advocates and those working internationally.

At the end of each Saturday participants were asked to fill out a trainer evaluation. In addition mid-way into the course, we held a group discussion and an individual response reflecting on the course so far. Session 9 and 10 included written and oral reflection exercises. Participant evaluations indicate that the 3 objectives were substantially achieved and that their knowledge of Human Rights Advocacy was greatly enhanced.

The evaluations are drawn from throughout this report.

3. Background, Context and Rationale

The program was a product of discussions between DTP and its Burmese alumni in Australia. These discussions focussed on how DTP could build on its long record of

support for Burmese human rights activists. Unlike most other countries in the region it is almost impossible for human rights activists from within Burma to leave the country to participate in DTP's regional courses. Over the years DTP has provided training to many in the exiled Burmese human rights movement – including Burmese working to address the plight of Burmese migrant workers in Thailand, Malaysia and elsewhere.

Over time more of these refugees have become settled in Australia, joining other members of different communities from Burma who have settled here over the years. Those resettling in Australia face the considerable challenges of making a new life in a new country, at the same time as knowing the realities facing those left behind in Burma and the refugee camps, and retaining their commitment to ending the military regime and its widespread violations of human rights.

Communities from Burma provide social, economic and cultural support to each other here in Australia, at the same time as drawing on their own resources to continue to help those in need on the border and inside Burma. At the same time they see the need to reach out to the broader Australian community – for solidarity and for resources - and to the Australian government for more effective international advocacy on human rights in Burma.

From discussions with DTP alumni and with members of different community organisations, it was agreed that an advocacy capacity building program should seek to work more with Australian based advocates from Burma. It was also noted that as an organisation focussed on education and training, the Diplomacy Training Program provided a neutral forum in which different communities could come together, share knowledge and perspective and identify ways to work together on the human rights situation in Burma.

A note on terminology: Burma is today officially known as Myanmar. The name change was the decision of the military regime that came to power through the bloody suppression of the democratically elected government and its supporters. The preference of Burmese advocates is that Burma continues to be used rather than Myanmar. This is reflected in the report. Burma is a country made up of many different ethnic/national identities. The term Burmese is often used to refer both to people from Burma and also people from the Burmese/Burman ethnic group. Other groups include the Karen, Shan, Mon, Arakenese, Rohingyas. The representatives of these groups are united in their opposition to the military regime and identify the end of this regime as their shared priority. In order to be inclusive and respectful of these different identities this report refers where possible to “people/advocates from Burma”.

4. Program Description - Overview and Highlights

The program schedule was developed by DTP staff and its Burma Program Coordinator, Elizabeth Newell, in consultation with DTP alumni and the Sydney branch of JACDB (Joint Action Committee for a Democratic Burma). It was decided that the program would run as 10 whole day sessions over 20 weeks on Saturdays as this model would best suit the work competing commitments of participants. Most sessions were a fortnight apart starting on July 14th and finishing on December 15th 2007. Each Saturday started at 9.30 and finished at 4 and was facilitated by a DTP staff member, usually the Burma Coordinator, and often a DTP volunteer, as well as the trainer for the day.

The main focus of the first 2 days was an introduction to the Universal Declaration for Human Rights – its key principals and values and on the international framework of human rights law that has been developed and adopted by the global community over the past 60 years. Burmese human rights advocates have been successful in engaging different parts of the UN system, including most recently in getting Burma onto the agenda of the UN Security Council. There is a UN Special Rapporteur on Burma, and during this course a special representative of the UN Secretary General was also appointed in response to the protests in Burma and the subsequent crackdown. The new UN Human Rights Council has also given priority to the situation in Burma. While none of these initiatives have so far been successful in bringing about change, the processes and options are important for advocates to understand – not least as they may provide a context for requests to be made of the Australian government.

The situation of Burma is an illustration of the gaps that exist between the promise of the UN and of international human rights standards, and the real politics of international relations. China, India and Russia are all for example perceived as being responsible for blocking more effective pressure on the Burmese government, because of perceptions of national self-interest. Dr Sarah Pritchard led these sessions and her realistic summary of the role of the UN was keenly respected and resonated with the group. A participant wrote:

‘(Sarah) made me realise not to give up on the UN, that we need to be patient and understand its slow process and it will take time.’

‘Everyone needs this knowledge inside and out of Burma’

Participant Evaluation

The course also focussed on the Australian political system. Human rights advocacy in Australia is very different from the advocacy context that many of the participants have previously encountered. The course looked at the structures of government, the role of parliament and the potential role of MPs in taking up Burmese human rights issues. This was also a lesson in the reality of politics – how to interest and engage a Member of Parliament in injustice in another country – far from (most of) their own voters.

Andre Frankovits facilitated a day focussing on ‘Developing Advocacy Strategies’. Group exercises involved learning how to develop realistic, specific campaign goals and objectives. This training laid the foundation for later discussions where participants’ skills in critically evaluating their own campaigns showed application of newly acquired strategies. Participants were very stimulated by working in cross-cultural groups and by hearing of each other’s advocacy experiences.

“Before I get involved in an action, I start to think about whether it can be achieved in reality which I have never thought about before. Reality Check!”

Participant Evaluation

Janelle Saffin, a long term Burma activist and parliamentarian well known to many of the participants ran a day workshop on the Australian legal and political system. Janelle spent some time backgrounding the structure of the political system but her practical session on how to work with politicians for advocacy was avidly received. Some time

was spent on the idea of how to utilise 'the Australian national interest' to promote the Burma struggle. Her optimism and understanding of the resilience necessary to maintain the 'mindset of an activist' was continually referred to in later sessions and highlighted the value of the involvement of activists as trainers.

'I felt she gave me the strength to develop the mindset of an advocate.'

'It was important for me to get to know the lecturers and learning of their involvement in Human Rights.'

Participant Evaluation

There was a day dedicated to developing understanding of the Australian media and the development of skills to work with the media in Australia – how to interest journalists, how to meet their needs for a story that would be of interest to their readers/viewers.

Andre Frankovits's second meeting with the group on 'Using the Media for Advocacy' involved an exercise where participants were asked to analyse a recent Burma media release. During the previous week many participants had attended the annual demonstration outside The Myanmar Embassy in Canberra to commemorate the massacres of 8.8 1988. Andre's incorporation of a group discussion activity of this annual action was useful and powerful. When the two journalists, Sian Powell and Tim Johnston arrived in the afternoon Andre had organised the participants as if they were a press gallery. Participants attempted to 'grab' the journalists' attention. Sian and Tim's feedback was in the form of practical tips related to their experiences. Many participants commented on the value of meeting 'real' journalists.

Philip Chung's session on Using the Internet for Advocacy was highly commended as an 'essential toolkit' for an advocate and was particularly well received by participants who are involved in journalism and radio. Many wished this session had been longer. Unfortunately, attendance was affected by about 20% in this and the following 2 sessions as the crisis in Burma meant many participants were committed in organising weekly demonstrations and meetings as well as coinciding with end of year exams for students. The 7th session on fundraising and accessing project grants for Burma projects was specifically designed to meet the interests of the group and conducted by three experts from Caritas Australia.

Paul Redmond's session on Human Rights and Corporations looked at the topical issue of investment in Burma by corporations and the responsibilities that corporations have in relation to human rights. Advocates have called for economic sanctions on Burma – and these calls have been listened to by the UN and the European Union, but not by Australia or countries in Asia. Advocates were successful in using the Alien Torts Claims Act in the US to get US oil company Unocal to withdraw its involvement in a gas pipeline construction – and in getting compensation for villagers. Outside of the US there are more limited options for action on corporations – but focussing on corporate responsibilities and action can be an effective advocacy strategy.

There were sessions on the role of international aid and on fundraising. Andre Frankovits ran the session on Human Rights and Overseas Aid. Being the third time Andre had worked with the group made for a familiarity and ease of interaction that enabled discussion to build on previous skills where participants were able to

collaboratively share critical evaluation of each other's ideas. Many participants articulated this kind of discussion as a highlight of the course.

Communities from Burma are very generous in their support and many resources manage to get channelled back to those in need in the refugee camps on the border. At the same time, the possibilities and practicalities of reaching out to the broader Australian community were explored. There is a lot of good will and resources to be tapped into, if advocates have the knowledge and skills to do so.

The last session brought everyone together through a role play enacting a Parliamentary Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with Myanmar and evaluation discussion. A wonderful Burmese lunch was served followed by a formal certificate of completion ceremony officiated by Burmese Dr. Malia and Patrick Earle.

Discussions and examples were linked to the Burmese context in every session. As the course was spread out over a 5 month period, the group's 'on the ground' activism could be incorporated into discussions. The crisis surrounding the Monks in Myanmar did erupt in September and 2 sessions had to be rescheduled as a result of the increased advocacy and fundraising work affecting all members during this time.

The Burma Coordinator, Liz Newell, Patrick Earle the Executive Director of DTP, and the DTP Training Advisory Committee selected course trainers for the 10 sessions. A DTP intern, Lillian Dang provided valuable support to the running of the program.

The trainers who contributed their time and expertise were; Dr Sarah Pritchard, Emeritus Professor Garth Nettheim, Emeritus Professor Paul Redmond, Philip Chung, who are all current DTP board members, Andre Frankovits, Maria Prescilla, Michael Peyra and Jamie Isbister from CARITAS Australia, Janelle Saffin now an ALP Member of Parliament and long time Burma activist and journalists, Sian Powell and Tim Johnston.

5. Participants & Selection of Participants

This program was especially adapted to suit the needs of the People of Burma living in Sydney. This program accepted all applicants recommended by JACBD and their other contacts in various communities. The JACBD steering committee was committed to recruit representation from a variety of ethnic groups and to equal gender participation.

While DTP strongly recommended high competency in English it was agreed that the ability to interpret and work in their first language would enable a few lower English competency speakers to benefit from the course. The response was greater than expected with a total of 35 applications, 20 male and 15 female who were all accepted. Some drop out was anticipated because the course was running over a 5 month period but in fact, the discontinuation rate was nil in the first 6 sessions. A number of applicants were from interstate, 2 from Melbourne and 4 from Canberra. This was made possible as travel costs were shared by DTP and participants.

Most participants were Karen (17) which is the largest ethnic group represented in Sydney another 7 were Mon, 1 was Shan, 2 Rohingya and the others Burmese. It is very significant that participants were choosing to work together from a variety of ethnic backgrounds as this has not often being the case in Sydney communities. The

facilitation of networking opportunities across ethnic groups was one of the key goals for the program.

There was a broad range of ages, educational qualifications and work experience.

Participants could be grouped into the following broad categories as a means of indicating the range represented within the group, a mix which was considered important for discussion and networking.

- Those who left Burma as early as the 70's and up to the 90's who completed tertiary education there and who had careers in Burma.
- Those who left Burma via refugee camps in neighbouring countries, who have been here for more than 5 years and have completed some education in Australia and who now have careers in Australia
- Those who have lived many years in border refugee camps and who have arrived here in the last few years.
- Those who arrived in Australia as child refugees and who have been completely educated in Australia.

Most participants have experienced significant hardship and their deeply felt motivation to support those left struggling in Burma and in the refugee camps provided a basis for their commitment to the DTP course. Most participants work continually and relentlessly supporting newly arrived refugees and fundraise for communities in Burma or border regions, in addition to working to support themselves. Many also currently attend or have attended educational courses to develop new careers here and to learn English. On top of all their other demands and commitments, participants elected to give up 10 Saturdays to study and discuss human rights advocacy. Their commitment is significant and admirable.

Four participants drove every Saturday from Canberra to attend the DTP training leaving at 5am. All four are remarkable young activists. Lwii is 22 and has lived in a Thai refugee camp for many years, where his parents still live, and has had only minimal education while living in the monastery as a child monk. He is now studying to complete his high school here, which is his first experience of formal schooling. He spends after school and weekends teaching the Mon language and culture to younger Mons and supporting his community to settle into Australia. He organises cultural events to raise funds to send to refugee camps.

Participants are involved in a wide range of careers and skills regarding advocacy and activism. For many their knowledge is deeply embedded in their personal struggles to survive under the military regime and their continued commitment to activism reflects bravery and strength:

Sein is a young woman recently arrived in Australia who has worked for the International Refugee Council providing emergency health care support to displaced persons in the jungles.

Joseph is a retired medical doctor who has extensive experience running health based aid programs. He is currently supervising an NGO funded project setting up a sewing

training workshop on the Thai border whose profits are being used to provide childcare for refugee children in a camp.

Shwe is a long time activist of over 40 years. He is the founding member of the Burmese Community Broadcasting Group and runs the weekly Burma radio program broadcasting in Australia.

Most participants are currently involved in supporting new arrival refugees and some are employed by Australian welfare agencies:

Chit Chit, an English teacher at the Australian College of Languages has enabled a specialist class to run on Saturdays to support Karen speaking women to learn English.

Daniel who prior to arriving recently in Australia was a deputy leader of a Refugee Camp of 10,000 refugees is now employed to support newly arrived refugees.

While the knowledge base of the participants is deep, their motivation for attending the DTP course was to gain the skills required to run advocacy campaigns aimed at lobbying Australian and other governments and NGOs. They expressed an awareness of their need as a community to understand the mechanisms of efficient advocacy in the Australian context and to do so in English. Some participants have skills gained in Australian institutions which they hope will be of direct use in their work as advocates.

Sai has been a journalist for many years, writing for various Burma papers. He is currently completing a Communications Degree in journalism so he can continue this work in English.

Melinda has recently completed a law degree and is working as a corporate lawyer and has written articles on International Human Rights. She feels her education will enable her to be a better advocate for her people of her birth country.

The diversity represented by the group was greatly valued by all participants and lies at the core of the programs success. Participants were generous in their sharing of knowledge and experiences, and created a safe and respectful learning environment that enabled many different perspectives to be shared.

6. Training Methodology and Materials

The training was designed to be as participatory, practical and interactive as possible with an emphasis on group work, role-plays and discussion so as to ensure the practical relevance of all training sessions. Efforts were made to integrate practice with theory within each session. A number of whole days were developed specifically for this particular community and in most other sessions exercises and case studies were prepared to reflect the needs of the people of Burma. Trainers were provided with both written and verbal briefings to assist in the preparation of their sessions.

It became evident that many of the usual articles that form the basis of the DTP manual did not easily support the often Burma specific content of this program. Where possible participants were provided with session notes. Some participants provided constructive

feedback on the content and format of the session notes which is addressed in the participant evaluations and recommendations.

7. Program Venue and Catering

The program was held in the Westmead Campus of the University of Western Sydney with the exception of the Internet session which was conducted at The University of Technology in the city. The location was chosen so as to make the course as accessible as possible to the majority of the participants who live in Sydney's western suburbs.

The training room was basic but large enough to accommodate the large group and had facilities for tea and coffee. There were tables and microwaves we could use for lunch and grass outside for breaks. The rooms were donated free of charge by UWS and each week a different community group from the participants provided Burmese lunch for everyone. Organisation of morning teas were shared between DTP and JACDB.

8. Participant Evaluations

- **Networking and Discussion**

Without exception all participants expressed that a highlight of the course was the chance to network with those of different ages, experience and ethnic background. Structured small discussion groups where the activity centred on the issues of Burma were highly valued. The DTP context supported a willingness to build trust and sense of moving forward through difference to find unity.

'I could learn so much from sharing our experience and information and create closer ties and better understanding and build better relationships between different groups who cry for the same cause'

Participant Evaluation

The opportunity for whole group feedback with a trainer guiding constructive critical responses was also seen as a kind of modelling they hoped to emulate in their own groups. Not surprisingly therefore most, if not all, participants, were in favour of the group composition being made up of people from different (Burmese) communities.

'It was wonderful we became more confident and understanding. We built in trust and unity'

'It has been really great meeting and getting to know more people in the Burma community, sharing our experiences and ideas which has also paved the way for all of us to keep in touch with each other and continue to work together for our cause.'

Participant Evaluation

Quite a few participants commented on the challenges facing the people of Burma in regards to speaking up in a group and the unwillingness to disagree with elders. The DTP context helped break down these barriers. Some felt the presence of more Australian trained young people from Burma was very important modelling for the development of more participatory discussion.

'So many are shy and afraid to talk up or write...The second generation is brought up very different to the first generation. Please give them all the advice to keep talking and communicating with each other.'

Participant Evaluation

While many took advantage of the opportunities to speak up and critically evaluate each other's views and to practice public speaking there were a significant number who did not voice their views. Quite a few indicated interest in learning more about how to run meetings, manage conflict in discussions, keep meetings to agendas and how to develop leadership in a group.

- **Interacting with the agents of advocacy**

Evaluations indicate that the sharing of personal experiences from practised activists was highly valued especially where practical suggestions could be discussed. Janelle Saffin touched a deep note with the group by her recognition of the personal qualities necessary to maintain the mindset of an activist especially relevant to the long struggle most people of Burma have had to endure. The opportunity to interact in a role play, or structured discussion with currently active journalists, politicians and aid agencies were highly valued. The group also indicated an interest in learning from other non-Burmese activists in Australia, in particular Indigenous Australians, which they hoped could be incorporated into future programs.

'I would like to learn more about the struggles of the Indigenous people of Australia and how they have pressured the Australian government'

Participant Evaluation

This suggestion was met with interest as was the suggestion to meet with activists from recently arrived refugee groups such as the Sudanese, in particular Sudanese women.

- **Knowledge from experts**

A deep gratitude was continually expressed to all the experts who shared their knowledge and a constant awareness of how much more they would like to have learnt given more time and better English. Requests for more depth and time to absorb content was requested repeatedly.

- **Impact of DTP on own practice**

Participants were asked to reflect on how they perceived the DTP course to impact on their work as activists in the near future. The range of responses is confirmation of the broad ranging impact such a course can have on a community and the ripple effect of new knowledge and skills. Effect can be both direct and indirect.

'As a journalist I now will 'write articles that gain pressure on Australian Government or companies in Australia'

'I can better continue to set up more campaigns lobbying the Australian government to take action against the SPDC and urge them to stop police training and sanction effectively'

'I want to set up an NGO for HR work and to raise funds for women and infants project. I will approach a Nobel Prize laureate to be a patron to get a higher profile for the NGO. I will get at least 50 members, develop a formal structure and constitution so funding agencies can see a well structured profile in order to attract funds.'

'I intend to continue to network and keep in touch with a wide range of community members from all ethnic backgrounds so when ideas or plans do need to be implemented we will have the strategies and skills to draw on'

'I want to make a documentary on the plight of the Internationally Displaced Persons. This will involve going to the border area. '

'I will continue to be committed to the Sydney Burma Network. I hope I will be able to contribute new knowledge I have learnt from DTP in discussions'

'I just have to continue studying and learning English so I can keep a stronger understanding of the sessions. I know I want to understand more.'

'Yes I will definitely like to actively engage the new Labor Government to develop an effective policy on the Burma crisis. I am organising a letter writing campaign amongst my friends to new members of government and also engage with my peers in the government departments to raise awareness. ' Melinda – lawyer

'At the moment we have a plan for selling food in the Multicultural Festival and using better skills for fundraising for our community back home. I will make realistic plans and keep in good timeframes'

'I will always reflect on whether our goals for a campaign are realistic'

Participant Evaluation

The resounding impact was in the area of campaign strategies: how to set realistic goals, how to link strategies to the goal, how to keep within a time frame and the importance of honest evaluation.

9. Recommendations and Suggestions for Improvement

- **The Question of English Competency and Teaching Methodology**

The majority of suggestions for improvement and areas reflecting lower ratings in trainer evaluations can be linked to the English skills of the participants. DTP and JACDB made the decision to accept all applicants provided they indicated a level of English ability sufficient to benefit from the course. It is important to acknowledge that all participants, whatever their English level, did say that they gained from the course.

At the very least the opportunity to mix with a range of people and discuss issues in Burmese was considered important. That said, it was evident that a level of frustration existed with those who felt they could not gain access to the knowledge they so wanted. As soon as trainers used political or legal language many participants said their comprehension dropped to 60% or lower. Their dependency on key notes and teaching aids was continuously articulated.

Many felt that their comprehension would have been enhanced with the increased use of the following teaching tools:

- Notes with key points before the session – introducing specialist words
- Key points presented during the session in a simple Power Point
- Detailed notes to refer to after the session so they could get check comprehension and ask for assistance from others. Even fairly high level English speakers find it too difficult to take notes while concentrating on listening.
- Diagrams – specifically on the UN and Australian political system
- Use of cartoons or visual aids
- Opportunities to talk in small groups about the content at regular intervals
- Recapping key points at the end of sessions

For many, the DTP course highlighted their need for high level English skills and even those with competent speaking skills felt the pressure. Trainers continually pointed out the need to be: media literate, a concise and clear public speaker able to present a case in 2 minute grabs and a competent writer to construct effective media releases.

Refugees rarely have the luxury of being able to advocate their cause in their first language and in the case of the ethnic minorities almost never. For most of the participants English is their 3rd or 4th language and for a few who have travelled as refugees in various countries English is their 6th or even 7th language. In addition for many, their experience of formal education has been limited by the circumstances in Burma making the skills of note taking and summarising even more challenging.

'Some of us have not had this opportunity to stand up and speak for 2 minutes and say everything we want. I think we need so much practice with this.'

This is the first time I have tried to learn things this way'

Participant Evaluation

Evaluations would indicate that the most powerful changes the DTP course could make to increase its effectiveness would be around the incorporation of some of the techniques of Second Language teaching.

Another suggestion made by some participants was to limit the DTP course to only higher level English speakers. Others thought that selecting higher English competency would be good in an advanced course.

'I would strongly recommend that there be a selection criteria to require a level of proficiency in English. This is to ensure that all of the participants will be able to take part in group discussions and activities during the training session.'

Participant Evaluation

10. Participant Reflections on Content areas

Overall participants thought that all topic areas were important to cover but felt that their ability to access the knowledge depended to some extent on the presentation and their ability to access the language. Topics such as the United Nations, corporations and the Australian political system they would have like more detail and plain English notes.

The group unanimously felt that more time could have been given to lobbying techniques and the study of examples of successful campaigns. This included their interest in meeting select politicians, journalists and activists and the opportunity to interact with them in some structured manner.

- **Structure of course**

The ten sessions spanned 5 months from July to December, a few weeks later than originally scheduled. The group stayed positive and committed for most even though the momentum was a difficult to maintain in the last 4 sessions. Participants were asked to reflect on what course structure would best suit them should the course be repeated in the future.

From 25 evaluations 12 preferred a 10 day intensive course, in school or university holidays, 9 suggested a more condensed weekend option over 2.5 months, 3 preferred it a day a fortnight and 1 wanted the course stretched out over 20 half days. (note that not all evaluations were returned)

The reasons stated in favour of the intensive course option were that momentum, group dynamics and retention of knowledge would be enhanced.

One of the advantages of a course stretched over time is the opportunity to incorporate real events into workshops and time between enables time for reflection, practical application and homework tasks. It also allows for the participation of activists unable to take time off work and for women with children to attend. Although the majority are interested in an intensive course the option of a mixed course structure, utilising some overnight weekend sessions and some single weekend days condensed to a maximum of about 2.5 months would satisfy the strengths of both course structures.

- **Directions for 2008**

Time was spent discussing in what ways DTP could continue to support the People of Burma in 2008. Participant's interest in deepening capacity on a variety of fronts was evident in their support of the following suggestions.

- 1 Repeat Course for new participants. (Sydney or Melbourne based)

- 2 Advanced Course for small group who have completed the course. (Intense course focusing on particular skills such as writing media releases, lobbying politicians, internet advocacy, using video)
- 3 A Course located on Thai border region to include a significant number of participants from Australia and including some who have completed this course. This would maximise networking and provide vital links between the two areas and supports the leadership building for those attending the course again.

1. Repeat of course for People of Burma in Sydney

Word has spread in the community about the DTP course and participants felt that it was important that more of the community attend the course. The following recommendations could be used as a guide.

- Keep as much ethnic diversity and gender balance within the group.
- Tighten the course structure to 10 sessions over 2.5 months and to include some intensive weekend sessions preferably in school holidays. No Oct –Dec sessions.
- Provide more plain English notes linked directly to the content for pre reading
- A facilitator to write up notes during each session including group discussion notes to hand out at next session.
- Incorporate more guest speakers to short sessions – eg: journalists, politicians, activists from other minority groups,
- Include a session with Indigenous activists on Indigenous activism
- Provide support visual support materials on UN and Australian system

2. Advanced Course

About 13 participants were interested in an advanced course focusing in more detail on aspects of HR advocacy. There was discussion around the possibility of them working together on a particular campaign and drawing on DTP expertise to support skill building in certain areas such as engaging the media or building relationships with politicians. The group, characterised by higher English levels and experience in advocacy would certainly build capacity and leadership within the community. Such a course could give DTP trainers an opportunity to skill share more effectively and provide specific expertise needed by a united group of activists.

3. A Course Located on the Thai Border

The group is extremely aware how their brothers and sisters on the border would benefit from such a course. They would like that both communities to have access to the same knowledge base provided by DTP and to engage in vital inter national networking to improve advocacy strategies. The difficulty of bringing activists to Australia makes the option of taking activists there a much more practical solution. The group was very keen to explore this option.

Participants would be able to provide some insight into what aspects of the course may be most beneficial to those at the border. Some participants could become facilitators and interpreters and deepen the capacity building built into DTP training.

Manual chapters

No chapters were explicitly utilised in any of the sessions except for the campaign strategies chapter from the Amnesty International Handbook. The link between sessions and chapters could be improved. Certainly a repeat course could include the notes provided by trainers each week which could not go in the manual at the beginning as the course was so drawn out over a 5 month period.