



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

Intensive Program for the People from Burma

A Follow-up Capacity Building Program for Community Advocates from Burma living in Australia

**September 5-7 and October 4-5, 2008
Sydney, Australia**

Draft Program Report

“I will tell others about the practical skills that we gained and the fantastic trainers that we had access to. The Burmese Community needs to build stronger ties with the general community in Australia and to raise awareness generally and we need to use advocacy skills to do so.”

Quote from participant evaluations

1. Executive Summary

The Diplomacy Training Program (DTP) held the “Intensive Program for the People from Burma” from 5-7 September and 4-5 October 2008. This program was a follow-up training program for alumni of the DTP’s “Human Rights and Advocacy Program for the People from Burma” held in 2007. In contrast to typical DTP programs which bring together advocates from across the Asia-Pacific region, these programs were organised specifically for advocates from Burma living in Australia. Both the 2007 and 2008 programs were coordinated by Elizabeth Newell.

DTP’s work with advocates from Burma dates back to the inclusion of Burmese human rights advocates on DTP’s first courses in the early 1990’s. The 2007 program was developed through consultations with the Sydney-based Burmese communities, DTP alumni and the Joint Action Committee for a Democratic Burma (JACDB). The 2008 program was developed in response to the 2007 participants’ interest in further, more intensive training. Unfortunately, the course also arose out the lack of improvement in the situation in Burma, with Cyclone Nargis in May 2008 highlighting the continued brutality of the regime. This year’s program brought together 26 advocates, with representatives of Burma’s many ethnic communities, including the Burmese, Chin, Karen, Kuki, Rohingya, and Shan. Most of the participants reside in the Sydney area, but five out-of-state participants attended this year’s program—four participants from Melbourne and one from Brisbane.

Whilst the 2007 program was held over a series of Saturdays, the facilitators decided to hold the 2008 course over two weekends. The 2007 program was held on Saturdays for the convenience of participants working full time jobs Monday to Friday; however, although this format was convenient for participants, they missed out on the solidarity gained during a residential program. The facilitators felt that at least one of the weekends of the 2008 program should be residential allowing the participants to socialise over dinner and evening activities. Another benefit to holding a residential program was that it enabled out of state participants to attend while making only two trips to the Sydney area. DTP facilitators decided that the first weekend of the program would be a residential Friday–Sunday program held at a retreat like venue in the Sydney area. The second weekend of the program would be Saturday–Sunday only and would be non–residential, with DTP providing accommodation for the five out of state participants. This created a full five day program.

Another motive for holding a follow–up program was to create a more intensive program for the 2007 participants with advanced English skills. Based on the participant evaluations from the 2007 program, some participants with less English skills struggled, whilst participants with advanced English skills were keen to participate in a more advanced course. Although DTP endeavoured to accept candidates with high English proficiency, a small number of participants still struggled. As highlighted in the 2007 report, even high level English speakers often find it difficult to take notes whilst listening to a trainer. For this reason, DTP staff took notes during every session of the 2008 program to be distributed to the participants. The notes were also put onto a CD for the participants. The facilitators also encouraged trainers to use PowerPoint slides of their main points or other visual aides, to include handouts for participants, and to allow time for group activities and discussions. The 2007 report had also indicated that many participants felt that they needed more public speaking practice. For this reason, group activities, discussion, and role plays were included in many of the sessions.

Liz Newell facilitated the program, with the assistance Sarah Gembarowski. DTP is grateful to the program trainers including Jo Ford, Sam Maresh, Dr. Sarah Pritchard, Louise Williams, Philip Chung, Andre Frankovits, Myint Cho and Kaldoun Hajaj for generously donating their time and expertise to the program. DTP would also like to thank Oxfam Australia for its generous financial support for the program. Liz, Sarah and everyone at DTP would especially like to thank the Faculty of Law at the University of New South Wales for providing the venue for the training. To foster an environment of solidarity, the first weekend of the program was initially scheduled to take place at a retreat like venue south of Sydney. Less than two days before the start of training, DTP was notified that due to a zoning issue, this venue was

temporarily closing and would be unable to accommodate the group. A decision was made to move the program to the Law Faculty, and DTP is grateful to the Law Faculty for providing training rooms and technical support on such short notice. Lastly, DTP would like to thank the participants for their enthusiasm, their eagerness to learn, and their patience regarding the change in venue.

A note on terminology: As with the 2007 report, in order to be inclusive and respectful to different identities this report refers to “people/advocates from Burma.” Although 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, as 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/Burma ethnic group. Other groups include the Karen, Shan, Mon, Arakenese and 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.

2. Day 1, Friday 5 September

Session 1, Trainer Jo Ford

“I must say that [Transition to Democracy] was the most important topic we have. We have no plan for the future. Very useful and very well presented. Give us a lot of idea where to stand and where could have the solutions.”

Quote from participant evaluations

The program began on Friday 5 September with a morning session by Jo Ford, a PhD student and lecturer at ANU who is currently completing post doctoral studies in post conflict peace building and reconstruction. Jo explained that whilst other DTP sessions may focus on improving campaigning and advocacy strategies towards the shared goal of achieving democracy in Burma, his session would focus on preparing for the fall of the current military regime and planning for the transition to democracy. Jo used the example of his own country, Zimbabwe, to illustrate that whilst many in Zimbabwe are united in their desire to replace President Robert Mugabe, they must also develop a plan for “what happens after Mugabe.”

Jo began his session by asking each participant to draw a picture of a house they would like to live in, draw three items they would like to have inside it, and name the house. Afterwards, participants exchanged drawings. Jo explained that although the idea of a house is general, everyone has a different idea of how to draw a

house. In the same way, people have dramatically different ideas regarding more complex concepts, such as democracy. He urged participants to work together to develop a common understanding and vision of democracy in Burma. Jo stated that one major difficulty with democratisation is that it raises questions such as: “Who belongs?” and “What does it mean to be Burmese?”

Jo then divided participants into groups and asked them to name four top priorities they would hope to achieve during the transition. The group then discussed challenges that would arise from these goals. For example, some groups listed “federalism” as a priority and the group discussed the challenges between unity and divided power, between strong local and strong central governments. Another group listed “peace and justice” as one of their goals and Jo discussed the tensions that exist between these two concepts. For the example, if the current regime in Burma falls, communities may be divided on whether to prosecute members of the regime, and which members to prosecute. Jo explained that some new democracies have moved forward with no formal reconciliation process, others have prioritised reconciliation.

Jo noted that the topic of reconciliation links to whether or not the group would be willing to negotiate or make deals with the regime? He emphasised that this is an important topic for discussion among advocates. Would they be willing to negotiate with the regime, and if so what terms would they accept? He noted that outside parties, such as foreign governments many influence the group to accept terms that many be insufficient. Outside parties may also prioritise goals for the transition that differ from the goals of the people of Burma, and if the outside party is an ally in the transition to democracy it will be important to reconcile these goals as well.

In addition to the difficulties with reconciling the group’s views regarding a transition, and the views of outsiders, Jo also discussed problems that may emerge from the transitioning society. Likening a transition to “building a ship at sea,” Jo explained that transitions to democracy are lengthy; yet time will not stop to allow for careful planning. Jo stated that during and following a transition, there is often a problem of relative deprivation. People will have high expectations of what democracy will bring, and for many, changes will not occur rapidly enough.

With such a diverse group of advocates, from many ethnic backgrounds, Jo’s session emphasised the importance of coming together to share common goals for Burma’s future. Jo’s session inspired the participants by asking them to imagine a Burma after the fall of the regime, and to begin planning now for a transition to democracy in Burma. Participant evaluations indicated that participants rated the session very highly, though some indicated that they would like more time on the subject to examine transitions in more detail.

Session 2, Trainer Sam Maresh

“Sam gave us a valuable experience about how the Australian government make decisions and how they deal with delegates from various organisations. Very practical!”

Quote from participant evaluations

Day one continued with an afternoon session from trainer Sam Maresh. Sam’s experience as a former Chief of Staff made his sessions on “Lobbying in the Australian Context” useful and practical for the participants. He began his session with a discussion on the electoral pendulum, highlighting the importance of marginal seat members who fall the bottom of the pendulum. Parliament members with seats higher on the pendulum face only a minimal risk of losing their Parliamentary seat, whilst members at the bottom face a close election. Sam discussed the strategy of approaching these members representing marginal seats as they will be more receptive to voters in their electorate.

Sam also explained the hierarchy of government decision making, emphasizing the importance of targeting the Parliament members or government officials directly responsible for the issues advocates would like to address. Sam discussed several factors in government decision making, listing media and public opinion, caucus, location (of MP’s district), opposition, timing and third party comment as issues to consider before approaching a government minister. Sam also discussed resource and budget concerns and other public policy considerations, such as the likelihood of achieving the set objectives, and the scope for evaluation to allow for reporting on the objectives.

Sam also discussed power versus influence, explaining that whilst government decision makers hold power, others, including both internal and external players hold influence over the decision maker. Sam listed internal players with influence on Parliament ministers as, the Prime Minister, his office, other ministers, advisors, the public service and the caucus. Sam noted that it may be difficult to get a meeting with a member of parliament; therefore, he urged participants to endeavour to schedule meetings with government advisors. Whilst a meeting with a minister is more formal, a meeting with an advisor allows advocates to speak more frankly in a more personal, direct manner. If the advisor is sympathetic to the cause, he or she may assist in scheduling a meeting with the minister.

Further, Sam highlighted the importance of the influence of external players. He encouraged advocates to approach media, business and community groups, party head offices, and unions among others, as important contacts who may be of assistance in influencing government ministers. In particular Sam emphasised the importance of the media and the 24 hour news cycle, explaining that ministers constantly monitor the

press. He recommended befriended journalists in the press gallery who may influence the Press Secretary. By providing a journalist with information, the journalist may question the minister directly in the press gallery.

Sam finished his session by providing handouts to assist participants in preparations for his session the following morning, a role play activity, with groups of participants holding a mock meeting with Immigration Minister Chris Evans. Sam distributed copies of a speech by Minister Evans and a information on his recent activities in Burma.

3. Day 2, Saturday 6 September

Session 1, Trainer Sam Maresh

What session will be the most useful to you in your advocacy for Burma? Why?

“The session with Sam Maresh. Because we are in the process of engaging the local, state to federal politicians for Burma issue. Learnt valuable lesson and can now know the reasons why we failed before.”

Quote from participant evaluations

Sam began his Saturday morning session by emphasising the importance of “selling your message” to the participants. He stated that developing an ongoing conversation with politicians, confidants, or anyone with influence is crucial. He also suggested using a “hook,” such as an important event like Cyclone Nargis. Advocates should also identify victims, such as people they know personally who have been affected. Above all, Sam highlighted the importance of selecting the proper target, with the target of the roll play being Immigration Minister Chris Evans.

Sam asked the advocates for ideas for today’s message to the minister. Suggestions ranged from asking the minister to end trade with Burma to pressuring the United Nations to renounce Burma’s United Nations seat. Sam then broke participants into groups to discuss potential topics for the role play meeting. During the activity Sam gave the group many helpful ideas for the role play. For example, one group suggested asking the minister to accept more refugees from Burma. Sam urged the group to be precise by specifying a specific number, such as double the number of refugees currently accepted. The group also suggested askind the minister not to send refugees to country towns with limited services and opportunities for education. Again urging the group to be more specific, Sam asked them to specify the area or suburb where they would like refugees to be settled and to give reasons for this request; for example, there is a large community of people from Burma living in that area. Other groups listed several requests for the minister. Sam advised participants

to prioritise their requests and to focus on putting forth one unified message to the minister. He also highlighted the importance of targeting the correct person with your request; for example, participants should not approach the Immigration Minister with requests relating to the United Nations.

Sam also highlighted the importance of preparation before any meeting with a government official. He stressed that it is never a good idea to surprise the minister—participants should contact the minister's department before the meeting to outline their request. Sam also explained the importance of preparing for the meeting by researching the government official you plan to target to learn about the minister's prior knowledge regarding Burma and actions the minister's has already taken. Prior to the session, Sam had provided participants with a handout of a speech given by Minister Evans, as well as a handout regarding his activities in refugee camps on the Burmese border. Referencing his handout, Sam pointed out that in 2008 the greatest percentage of refugees accepted into Australia were from Burma; therefore it is important to acknowledge efforts the government has made and to give solid reasons for requesting further places.

Participants also discussed the handout of a speech given by Minister Evans. In the speech, the Minister had asked his agency for the reasoning behind holding eight people from Burma on Nauru. Sam highlighted that this illustrates that the minister is aware of the situation in Burma, and is sympathetic to the issue. One of the participants pointed out that the eight people held on Nauru were Rohingya, and some of the Rohingya program participants knew these men personally. Sam stressed that this would be an excellent "hook" for the meeting, and that the Rohingya participants might begin their meeting with the minister by giving him a thank you letter from the Rohingyas who had been detained on Nauru.

Groups then prepared for the role play, with Patrick Earle acting as Minister Chris Evans. During the role play activity, Sam provided the group with several helpful tips. For example, the first group asked the minister to accept more refugees from Burma, but the minister replied that there would be resource and budget constraints to consider. Sam informed participants that if the minister gives no promise in relation to this request, participants should ask him to formally ask the department to review the current intake. If the minister does agree to a request, Sam emphasized the importance of assuring implementation by contacting the department in writing or by telephone. He also stressed that advocates are often given limited time for such meetings, highlighting the importance of providing one clear message and staying on topic. He noted that the minister may waffle, discussing actions already taken, or constraints on taking further action. Sam urged participants to be polite, but direct to bring discussion back to their request.

Sam emphasized the importance of following up on a meeting with a government official, regardless of the outcome of the meeting. He urged participants to ask the advisor for contact details, and to be sure to follow up with the advisor, as well as write a thank you letter to the minister. Depending on the outcome of the meeting, it may also be useful to contact the media as well as other advocacy groups or contacts involved.

Sam ended the discussion by providing participants with helpful guidelines for achieving a meeting with the minister in the first place. He instructed participants to submit their request to the minister's department in writing, clearly stating their name, the organisation they represent, and their agenda at the beginning of the letter, and to follow up the letter with a telephone call. He noted that minister's receive hundreds of letters, and the most successful advocates will be those who put forth a straightforward request.

Participant evaluations indicated that Sam's sessions were a favourite with participants. Many noted that his sessions would be useful to them in their advocacy and that the sessions had been beneficial in helping them to reflect on why past meetings with government officials had been unsuccessful. A few indicated difficulties with language and the pace of the sessions, asking for further handouts on the session to assist with language difficulties.

Session 2, Trainer Dr. Sarah Pritchard

What session will be most useful to you in your advocacy for Burma? Why?

“Sarah Pritchard, learned more about the different organs of the UN, how they work and how we can use them. Now I feel better equipped to be able to establish contact with the bodies. I know more about what sort of information is useful and how to engage with them.”

Quote from participant evaluations

Day two continued with a session on the UN system by Dr. Sarah Pritchard. Sarah began her session with an overview of important international treaties, such as the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. She then discussed the definitions of different types of international agreements, such as treaties, covenants, pacts and declarations, as well as the differences between treaties, bilateral treaties and multilateral treaties. Sarah explained that whilst declaration are adopted by the UN General Assembly, and are not binding, the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights is now seen as part of customary international law, which is binding. Thus, although Burma has not ratified certain treaties, such as the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is binding over States as it is considered part of customary international law.

Participants also discussed the role of the Security Council and China's tendency to veto attempts to use force in Burma. Participants queried whether the UN or another State could use force in Burma on the basis of humanitarian intervention. Sarah explained that whilst humanitarian intervention is a part of international law, it remains controversial. Humanitarian intervention is available when the Security Council is deadlocked and the threat is immediate and overwhelming. Unfortunately, Sarah noted that other States decision whether or not to intervene may depend on its own interests. Although there was strong international pressure for humanitarian intervention following Cyclone Nargis, force was not used against the regime.

Whilst participants illustrated some frustration at the inaction of the United Nations, Sarah discussed scope for advocates to take action through the process of Universal Periodic Review (UPR). She explained that each human rights treaty has a treaty body with a process of UPR. Whilst UPR is State based, with States providing reports on their own progress and the progress of other States, NGOs have the opportunity to prepare shadow or alternate reports. She explained that the reporting process leads to the production of a report with concluding observations. Sarah distributed a report on Burma's progress towards implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC). The report raised many concerns such as the issues of child soldiers, child labour, whipping and corporal punishment. This report was provided as preparation for a group activity after the break. Participants would be divided into groups for a role play session, with each group providing a shadow report report to the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which Burma has ratified.

One of the participants played the role of Chairwoman of the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. Groups brought up several human rights violations faced by women in Burma, such as rape, torture, lack of health care, poor working conditions in sweat shops and human trafficking. Sarah provided helpful guidance to each of the groups. She suggested using an organised, systematic approach, referring to a group that critiqued specific paragraphs of Burma's report and referred to specific articles of CEDAW in their counter arguments. Sarah also highlighted the value of using a personal account and vivid examples, as another group had focused on working conditions in factories, providing a moving account of the poor working conditions faced by many women.

Following the role play, Sarah encouraged participants to work with their advocacy organisations to prepare shadow reports in time for the next review in October, 2008. She noted that the reporting session would be two weeks long, with six reports being presented. She encouraged participants to remember that whilst the Burma's response to the report may be slow, the efforts of NGOs may have a "Dracula" effect on Burma. By shining light on human rights violations, in accordance to its treaty obligations, Burma must develop arguments in response to the session, and must report on progress at the next session. Whilst the process may be slow, it brings the regime into a human rights dialogue.

Evaluations indicated that participants found this to be a valuable and challenging session. Participants noted that this was a difficult subject area, but that Sarah had provided an excellent overview and participants felt more confident in engaging with the UN. Some indicated that they would like more time to explore this subject area as they found the UN to be complex and the language or treaties and reports more advanced. Evaluations also indicated that a few participants have lost hope in progress through the UN system and place more trust in engaging with the Australian government and media.

4. Day 3, Sunday 7 September

Session 1, Trainer Louise Williams

What session will be the most useful to you in your advocacy for Burma? Why?

"Louise Williams. Her guidelines were short and practical. She gave us a list of people we could contact."

Quote from participant evaluations

Day three featured a session by media trainer Louise Williams, a lecturer at the University of Technology and a former foreign correspondent, columnist, and foreign editor for the Sydney Morning Herald. Louise has visited Burma and reported in the region for many years. The topic of her presentation was "How to Make Burma an Australian News Story." She noted that whilst there is some awareness of the situation in Burma in Australia, with the exception of Cyclone Nargis, the situation has not been widely reported.

Louise discussed stories that "make news" and explained that most news stories are reported similarly to traditional stories, with readers enjoying stories where right and wrong is clear cut and the story has a personal, "human face." She pointed out that in the case of Burma, the story is very black and white—the victims are easy to identify, the state is the oppressor and there is even a heroine (Aung San Suu

Kyi) under house arrest. As the participants are all too aware, the situation in Burma has continued for decades, providing little “new news.” Louise emphasised that the key to media coverage of the situation in Burma would be finding new episodes that peak Australian interest and are relevant to Australia.

Louise also explained that with the rise of internet media, print media is declining and many newspapers are closing their foreign offices. She noted that the Sydney Morning Herald had recently closed its Bangkok office and that there are now fewer and fewer journalists in Australia with expert experience in the Asia region and Burma in particular. For this reason, stories often need to be pre-packaged and presented to journalists with little expertise in a particular area. She recommended a particular source, Margaret Gee’s *Australian Media Guide*, which includes thousands of media contacts, as a helpful resource for developing a story and locating and contacting the proper media targets.

Louise then discussed approaching the proper media outlet for a story. Participants began a discussion on traditional print media versus newer online media outlets. Louise urged participants to use both traditional print media and online media for their advocacy. She also stressed the importance of building a central online “hub” of Burmese organisations in Australia to enable journalists to quickly link to several organisations of advocates from Burma.

Participants then discussed ideas for stories on Burma that they could prepare and submit to media outlets. One of the participants had recently travelled to Burma following Cyclone Nargis and had video taped many of the survivors. He showed the video tape to the participants, along with drawings made by some of the children who had survived the Cyclone. Louise noted that the drawings by the children from Burma would provide an excellent human touch to a media story. Louise asked the group to consider how they could utilise the video and drawings for advocacy. Participants responded that they would advocate for resources, clean water, education and mental health services for the victims. Louise also asked the participants to consider which media outlets would best show case the drawings. Louise explained that the story would not go well in an outlet that could not showcase the drawings, such as radio. A newspaper would not be ideal either—the drawings would be best showcased in a magazine such as the *Australian Women’s Weekly*.

Participants then discussed other ideas for media stories on Burma. Louise suggested linking deforestation in Burma to climate change. Louise suggested that stories on climate change would be well suited to print media such as the *The Age* or *Sydney Morning Herald*, or television such as the *7:30 Report* or *Foreign Correspondent*. She encouraged participants to approach other organisations for support with the story before approaching the media; for example, Green Peace or World Wildlife Fund

might be willing to help with developing a story about deforestation. Louise encouraged the group to brainstorm other ideas for environmental themed stories, and they suggested stories about endangered river dolphins and the sale of seafood imported from Burma, which benefits the military regime.

Participant evaluations indicated that Louise's session was another favourite. Participants were enthusiastic regarding interacting with the media, indicating that they believe greater Australian media coverage of events in Burma can bring real change to the country. Participants appreciated that Louise gave them media contacts and suggested helpful resources such as Margaret Gee's Australian *Media Guide*. Participants indicated that Louise's practical session had given them more confidence in developing a story, and targeting the proper media outlet. Some participants indicated that they would have liked a longer session with Louise to explore the topic area more fully.

5. Day 4, Saturday 4 October

Session 1, Trainer Philip Chung

“Very good, we want to learn more to use this useful tool [the internet] for our cause and effective lobbying.”

Quote from participant evaluations

The program resumed in early October with a morning session by Professor Philip Chung, Executive Director of AUSTLII. Following the September sessions participants discussed ideas for the training sessions in October. In response to Louise William's suggestion that participants develop an internet “hub” for journalists and others to easily access information about Burma, participants agreed that developing a hub would be discussed during Philip's internet advocacy and website development session.

Philip focused on developing a website which could be used as a central hub. He explained that to develop a website, participants must first decide on the site structure. He suggested including links on the homepage of topics such as “Events,” “the Overseas Community in Burma,” and “Media Releases.” The group suggested several topics for thematic areas to include on the site, such as economics, human rights, environmental, refugee and Indigenous issues. Philip encouraged the group to discuss consolidating and prioritising their ideas.

One member of the group worked as a web developer for *Burma Campaign Australia*. He showed participants the website for *Burma Campaign Australia* and explained the structure of the website. Philip made a few helpful suggestions for

developing websites, explaining that a website's homepage should be considered "valuable real estate." Only the most important information should be placed on the homepage. After further exploring the websites for Burma Campaign Australia and another community website, *Burma Gateway*, Philip asked participants to consider using the *Burma Gateway* website as the hub website. He noted that the website is well established, and already includes links to many Burma focused organisations. He urged participants to consider the effort required to create another hub, and to consider how to improve the *Burma Gateway* website.

Philip also discussed creating a blog and created a quick DTP blog for participants. He explained how to post comments to the blog, and how the creator of the blog can monitor the comments. He noted that a blog is a small step towards creating a proper website, and is an easy way to create an online discussion forum. For a website, a platform is needed and the participants discussed which organisations would have the resources to develop new websites.

Using the *Sea Monkey* program (which is free for anyone to download) Philip showed participants how to create a simple website. He explained how to name pages, create links to other pages and websites, and how to insert pictures. He included many helpful website formatting tips, such as using a table to align the layout of the website, and selecting proper colours and formats for text and background.

Separate evaluations were taken for the second weekend of the program, and included several questions regarding the participants' thoughts on developing a new website hub, using an existing site for a hub and how to make the hub more useful and accessible. Most participants indicated that they would support using an existing website as the hub but a few expressed concerns that a new website would be needed to ensure that the website was balanced and included input from all ethnic groups and communities. Many noted that resources were not available to create a new hub, and did not want to duplicate work already completed. Based on what they learned in Philip's session, participants made several suggestions for improving existing websites, such as simplifying the home page, changing the design and including a blog or public forum.

Evaluations indicated that many participants were keen to learn more about internet advocacy and would have preferred a longer session. Unfortunately, there had been issues with accessing the computer lab, and the start of the session was significantly delayed. Although the session finished later than was planned, time was still lost. This was due to a miscommunication with UNSW security, and the problem will be avoided in future programs, but the loss of training time was unfortunate as many of the participants lacked experience in this area. The range of the participants'

computer and internet skills was vast—some worked in web development, others, especially some of the older participants, were less computer savy. Some participants indicated that this was a new area for them, and they needed more experience in the area to enable them to participate in the dialogue regarding the website hub.

Session 2, Trainer Andre Frankovits

What session of the second weekend will be most useful to you in your advocacy for Burma? Why?

“From Andre Frankovits. To set a realistic and achievable goal, objectives, strategies and time frame are very useful to advocate for Burma.”

Quote from participant evaluations

Day four continued with an afternoon session on successful strategies for campaigning by Andre Frankovits. Andre began the session with a group activity. He used football as an analogy for campaigning, explaining that in football the goal is winning, the objective is scoring a goal, strategies include passing the ball, etc and resources include the players and coach. Andre asked participants to divide into groups with each group having at least one very experienced campaigner. The experienced campaigner would report to the group a successful campaign that they had been involved with in the past, and the other members would report back to the class on the goal, objective, strategies and resources involved.

Each group reported on a past campaign and Andre provided helpful input for increasing the campaign's effectiveness. The first group reported that their experienced campaigner had been involved in an event in Sydney to raise awareness of the Saffron Revolution with the goal of restoring democracy in Burma. Andre highlighted the importance of setting small achievable goals along the way, such as a goal of raising Australian awareness. A second group wrote letters to government officials with the goal of taking action against the regime through UN sanctions. Andre again pointed out the need for small achievable goals as members of the Security Council would likely veto sanctions, and government officials would have little influence over the UN.

A third group submitted a report to the government with the goal of preventing members of the regime from receiving Australian visas, but reported that there had been no follow up. Andre queried the goal of preventing members of the regime from travelling to Australia, and the group explained that this would put pressure on the regime. Andre urged participants to clarify the purpose of their request in order to win Australian support. A fourth group detailed an event held to raise awareness of the Saffron revolution. Andre noted that it is important to clarify a purpose beyond

“awareness raising” alone to set a specific goal, such as raising money to support the revolution, or for victims of the cyclone.

Another group had the goal of raising awareness of the situation at the Thai/Burma border to increase support for resettlement of refugees in Australia. They advertised in print media and on the radio and gave speeches. The group reported that the campaign had been successful in the Bathurst and several refugees were settled in the area. Andre noted that this was a great example of a successful campaign. He praised the campaign’s simplicity, limited scope, and achievable, specific goal.

Andre ended his session with a Powerpoint presentation on effective campaigning. He noted that advocates must identify specific goals, and urged them to set objectives within a given timeframe in order to measure progress. He also discussed devising effective strategies for each objective , noting the importance of distributing responsibility for specific tasks among a group and setting deadlines. He also indicated the value of working with allies, whilst being aware of opposition groups.

Evaluations indicated that participants saw great value in evaluating the effectiveness of past campaigns. They noted that they had been reminded of the importance of setting realistic, achievable goals within a set time frame. During the evaluations following the first weekend of the program, several of the 2007 alumni stated that they had enjoyed Andre’s 2007 sessions and would like another session with him during the second weekend. Participants were grateful to have Andre’s session included in the 2008 program, and many noted that they would have liked even more time with Andre to learn more about effective campaigns.

6. Day 5, Sunday 5 October

Session 1, Trainer Myint Cho

What session from the second weekend will be most useful to you in your advocacy for Burma? Why?

“Myint Cho’s session b/c it directly touches on the issues and information that we need to know in our advocacy work. It was also a useful insight into the work that being done by the overall movement.”

Quote from participant evaluations

The final day of the program began with a session by experienced Burma advocate Myint Cho. He had prepared a comprehensive Powerpoint presentation and began his session with background information on Burma’s political conflict. He noted the different countries that border Burma, and its some many ethnic and religious

groups. He discussed the many political, economic and social problems facing Burma as well as the different goals/visions of the regime, pro–democracy advocates, ethnic groups and others for the alleviation of these problems.

Myint Cho urged participants to seek support from the international community and identify a political support base. He noted that advocates must identify issues for response and set goals, and distribute areas of responsibilities for these issues among advocacy groups. He set out several principles for political organising in his presentation. Among his principles, he urged participants to plan proactively rather than reactively. As Andre had discussed, he also encouraged participants to assign responsibility for tasks to develop and maximise human resources.

Another principle Myint Cho set out was to “always be willing to ask” but “never fail to thank.” He emphasised that although the situation in Burma has persisted, advocates must continue proactive campaigning and continue to approach politicians and other organisations for assistance. He noted that there is no international consensus on Burma due to varying geopolitical interests, but that there is scope for Western democracies such as the United States and Australia to exert influence.

Participant evaluations noted that training from a Burmese advocate with direct knowledge of Burma was appreciated. Participants valued Myint Cho’s long experience in Burmese advocacy. Many, especially those with greater language difficulties, noted that his Powerpoint presentation and handouts of the slides were helpful with following the presentation and for referring back to the session after the training. As with other sessions, many participants indicated that they would have preferred a longer session with Myint Cho to allow more time for discussion and to hear more about his advocacy work.

Session 2, Trainer Khaldoun Hajaj

“His [Khaldoun Hajaj’s] presentation and knowledge are amazing. Thanks a lot! The issue and questions raised are realistic and very helpful for community. Wish we had more time to share his knowledge and idea.”

Quote from participant evaluation of trainers

The last session of the program was given by Khaldoun Hajaj, a trainer with experience in government relations, on the topic of community influence. Khaldoun introduced himself and his background as a Palestinian refugee and shared some photographs of Palestine with the participants. He began his session by stating that a community with influence is a community that is organised. Organised communities have their own institutions and spokespersons and have presence in the community.

He discussed the Greek community as an example of an organised community, able to vote as a block to influence electorates.

As Sam Maresh had discussed in his sessions, Khaldoun also emphasised the value of swinging electorates. Khaldoun asked participants to divide into groups and rate their power in relation to their electorate. Whilst some groups had lower political power because they either lived in safer electorates, or were not citizens and did not have voting rights, Khaldoun emphasised that an organised community group has the power to influence other voters as well as to influence ministers. Khaldoun used the community of East Timorese living in Australia as an example of a group successfully mobilising support from others outside their group—although there were few Timorese living in Australia, they were eventually able to generate great support for their cause. He noted the value of using existing institutions to drum up support—the Timorese had generated support through church groups, which often have great influence in communities.

Khaldoun next handed out the current Australian government *Community Information Summary on Burma*, a three page summary of key facts and figures on Burma and Australia. He explained that this 2006 document was the most recent summary available, and that most ministers, many of whom would have little prior knowledge on Burma, would refer to this document as a primary reference for information on the situation in Burma, and the situation of people from Burma living in Australia. Participants were surprised by the short length of the document and its brief mention of the military regime and refugee problems. It was clear that participants felt the document was both inaccurate and inadequate as a source for information on Burma. Khaldoun emphasised that community advocates may have the tendency to assume that people working in government are always well informed and will understand the problems facing their countries and their communities in Australia. He urged participants to be aware that many politicians are still not fully aware of the situation in Burma and the situation of people from Burma living in Australia.

Khaldoun explained that the challenge of making parliament ministers aware of Burma is to keep politics local. He noted that many ministers are uninterested in foreign affairs and are more interested in their own electorate. Advocates should seek the involvement of the wider Australian community through organisations such as sports teams, clubs and religious organisations.

Participants also discussed the strengths and weakness of the diverse community of people from Burma living in Australia. Many felt that less diverse communities with a shared ethnic background and religion, such as the Greek community, were stronger and more unified. Khaldoun encouraged the group to find unity in diversity. He used the example of Australia as a whole to illustrate that a diverse community of many

ethnic backgrounds and religions can be both strong and unified. He reminded participants that diversity can be an asset in drumming up support from different groups. For example, the group featured Muslim, Buddhist, and Christian participants, providing a broad religious community to approach for support.

7. Conclusion and Reflections

Program Location and Weekend Format

What was the best thing about the program to you? Why?

“The venue and the hotel because they are so close that not worry to travel, save time.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“The best thing about the program to me is accommodation, kitchen foods cos we’ve enough energy to study. No body is sleeping during the training.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“I think it is a really good time to do on the weekend because other people from other states can join.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“Yes esp. with networking with other organisations and persons interstate.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“A very good format. I am in favour of residential program. We got to know each other well. A good mix of young and old.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“Brilliant, it was good to have this sort of face to face contact with people over this time, and the outside-of-class social aspect really facilitated in-class interaction and participation and made the learning experience very enjoyable.”

Quote from participant evaluations

The majority of the participants indicated a preference for the program’s weekend format, noting that it was convenient for participants with work commitments during the week. As opposed to the 2007 program which met for one session each weekend over a number of weekends, most participants seemed to prefer the new, full weekend format. Participants recognised that this format was convenient for participants living outside of Sydney and acknowledged the benefit of interacting with interstate participants.

Participants also acknowledged the value of being able to participate in evening activities as a group. Originally the facilitators had planned to hold the first weekend of the program at a retreat like venue south of Sydney. The venue would have included shared rooms for the participants, a class room for the sessions and a kitchen for preparing meals and dining together. It was hoped that staying in a retreat like venue would enable greater solidarity between the participants. Unfortunately, this venue cancelled DTP's reservation at the last minute and DTP relocated the program to UNSW. DTP would like to express its appreciation to the Faculty of Law for providing class rooms at the last minute. If not for the in kind support of the Law Faculty, DTP may have been forced to reschedule the first weekend of the program at great inconvenience to trainers and participants.

During the first weekend of the program most participants stayed in Barker Lodge, a short walk from the Faculty of Law. A few participants living nearby commuted to the program from their own homes, but most participants were able to stay in Barker Lodge. This enabled participants to take part in evening activities including watching *The Diplomat*, sharing a Burmese meal at the Law Faculty, and eating at a local Kingsford restaurant. These evening activities were an important aspect of the program and were valued by participants who were able to take part.

The facilitators had originally planned to hold the second weekend of the program at UNSW. Accommodation was only to be provided for out of state participants in order to limit the costs of the program. As the majority of participants live in the Sydney area, many were able to attend dinner at a local Kingsford restaurant on Saturday night. A Burmese meal was also served at the Faculty of Law for the closing ceremony of the program. These evening activities and shared meals clearly fostered group interaction and were a valuable part of the program.

Participants

What was the best thing about the program to you? Why?

“Gathering people from Burma to know each other and share their knowledge and experience...”

Quote from participant evaluations

“Networking with people all with Burmese interests at heart.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“Above all to get a chance to meet difference people and share opinion with them.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“The networking opportunity with new friends and interstate candidates.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“Having an opportunity to meet and spend time with other people with similar interests. Now I know more about what other people are doing, how they are doing it; I was able to learn from them and also come up with ideas about how we can apply what we have learnt. “

Quote from participant evaluations

“The opportunity to learn from great trainers who are experts in their fields and to be able to network and share ideas and discussions with other members of the community with an interest in the Burma course.”

Quote from participant evaluations

Participants valued the opportunity to learn with other advocates from Burma. A few participants noted the value of including interstate participants in the program. The group including representatives of many of Burma’s ethnic communities, including the Burmese, Chin, Karen, Kuki, Rohingya, and Shan. Participants ranged in age from early 20s to 60s. Interacting with older, more experienced advocates was particularly valuable for the younger participants. Unfortunately male participants greatly outnumbered female participants in the program. A greater number of men had applied for the program, and most women who applied for the program were accepted. Although there were less female participants, a few of the women were particularly strong advocates, and greatly contributed to the program sessions.

Degree of Difficulty

Participants were asked to rate the degree of difficulty of the program on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “very difficult,” 3 being the “right level” and 5 being “very easy.” Responses indicate that the degree of difficulty could have been increased:

Difficulty Level	1 Very difficult	2	3 Right Level	4	5 Very Easy
Number of Responses	0	2	10	10	1

Surprisingly, only two participants rated the program on the difficult side of the scale. As the program was advertised as a follow-up intensive program for alumni of the 2007 program, alumni may have expected the program to be more challenging. However, despite participants’ ratings of the difficulty of the program, some commented on language problems:

“Too hard cause lack of languages and and actual capable of using direct vocabulary.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“Political terms and big vocabularies.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“Should have English level and terminologies/terms knowledge before hand.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“I think other participants may have found some of the concepts difficult to grasp (the UN material was quite dense)—but that’s ok. However I thin that the level of English could be simplified even more.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“Maybe have training on a tiered level e.g. those with good English and those with basic English skills.”

Quote from participant evaluations

Based on participants’ comments, the aspect of the training that posed the greatest challenge for participants was language and terminology. In the future, DTP should seek to simplify language, whilst maintaining a challenging curriculum. DTP could also distribute handouts on terminology both before and during the course.

Effectiveness of Training

“I think group of presentation program was the best thing. We got a lot of presentation skills from this program.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“Public speaking will be good I think.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“Majority of the Burmese are finding and thinking ways for National reconciliation, in other words, “PEACE”. But UN not active as we expected. At the same time we have only this channel to ask help. So, DTP training should focus on the real issues of Burma rather than just theories. We are not law students. We are not going to be law professions. We are activist and patriots finding ways for our freedom from this brutal regime.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“I need more Training more time about Human Rights and media skills.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“If possible How to Shoot the photo like when you look at the photo you can imagine or understand clearly without reading the information.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“I think we need to study about the using of media electronics equipments such as DVDs and VDO taking and e-camera and how to control, operate and connect to P.C.s”

Quote from participant evaluations

“I would like some role play in interviewing and interviewee for news media/ television etc.”

Quote from participant evaluations

Many participants commented on the value of the role play sessions and group activities. Participants particularly commented on the role plays in Sam Maresh’s and Sarah Pritchard’s sessions. A few of the program sessions were stand out favourites including Sam Maresh’s sessions on lobbying and Louise Williams sessions on media. A good number of participants showed great interest in the media session and indicated that would like to receive further, more in depth media training, such as training in using a video camera, and practicing interview skills.

Future Programs

“Perhaps also examine how to establish contact with other (non-Burmese) interst groups to work co-operatively. For example, with the Free Tibet movement.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“The program can also link up with trainers or participants from other programs on similar issues so that we can all share idea and experiences in advocacy. (i.e. other Asia training programs which have produced strong advocates and results in their advocacy work like in Timor, Indonesia, Philippines etc)”

Quote from participant evaluations

“It would be great if DTP focus on women issue too. The context of Australian and other countries.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“In future, if DTP can put conflict resolutions sessions it will be more useful for Burmese community.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“All attendees need to know the vision and purpose of the programme and also the goal and objective of the programme in details.”

Quote from participant evaluations

“Trainers should discuss more with advocates and brain-storm and most importantly give the feasible way [...] trainers should sincerely point what is right and what is wrong in Burma’s movement.”

Quote from participant evaluations

Looking forward to future programs, there are a number of different aspects for DTP to consider. A few participants indicated that a program with advocates from other countries or groups might be beneficial. Others suggested including additional sessions on specific topics, such as women’s issues, or conflict resolution.

A few participants indicated that they would like a more clear indication of the program objectives beforehand. Due to timing of the program, it was not possible to give applicants a better indication of the program schedule as many trainers had not yet been secured for the program. In the future DTP will aim to provide more specific objectives to the participants beforehand.

Conclusion

Overall, the program was a success. Bringing many of the alumni of the 2007 program back together provided an opportunity for them to refresh their skills. The more intensive weekend format of the program was a success and was convenient for most of the participants. The residential first weekend of the program heightened the solidarity of the group, and the evening activities and dinners were a valuable part of the program.

Many of the sessions of the program were greatly received by the participants. DTP is grateful to the trainers who generously contributed their time to the program: Jo Ford, Sam Maresh, Sarah Pritchard, Louise Williams, Philip Chung, Andre Frankovits, Myint Cho and Khaldoun Hajaj. Above all, DTP would like to thank the participants of the program, especially those who travelled from interstate to take part in the program. The participants in the program inspired each other, and inspired everyone at DTP through their generous spirit, their eagerness to learn, and their desire to work together towards a greater outcome for the people of Burma.

8. Appendix 1: Program Schedule

Intensive Program for the People of Burma 2008

**Sydney, Australia
September and October 2008**

Schedule Weekend One

	Friday September 5	Saturday September 6	Sunday September 7
Morning 1	9.00 – 10.00 arrive 10.00–11.00 Goals and objectives introductions DTP Director Patrick Earle	9.30 – 11.30 Lobbying in Australia – Practical Exercise Sam Maresh	
Morning Tea			
Morning 2	11.00–1.00 Transition to Democracy	Lobbying con` ^t	10.30–12.30 Media Skills
Trainer:	Jo Ford	Sam Maresh	Louise Williams
Lunch			
Afternoon 1	2.00–3.30 Transition to Democracy	12.30–2.30The UN and Burma – Post Cyclone Nargis and Referendum – Options for Future Advocacy – Australia	Course Reflections/Evaluations – Next Steps
Trainer	Jo Ford	Dr Sarah Pritchard	
Afternoon Tea			
Afternoon 2 Topic	4.00–5.30 Lobbying in the Australian Context Solidarity,	3.00–5.00 The UN and Burma – Options for Future Advocacy – Australia	
Trainer	Sam Maresh	Dr Sarah Pritchard	
Dinner			
After dinner Select film discussion	DVD “The Diplomat”	Select film discussion or discussion	

Schedule Weekend Two:

	SATURDAY October 4
8:30–9:00	Meet in Staff Common Room Level 2
Morning 1 9.00 to 10.30	Computer/Internet Research Training (ALL DAY) Room: CLAB 111 (level one, inside the law faculty library)
Trainer(s)	Philip Chung
Morning Tea 10:30–10:45	
Morning 2 10:45–12:30	Continue Computer/Internet Research Training
Trainer(s)	Philip Chung
Lunch 12:30–1:00	
Afternoon 1 1:30–3:00	Continue Computer/ Internet Research Training
Trainer(s)	Philip Chung
Afternoon Tea 3:00–3:15	
Afternoon 2 Topic 3:15–6:15	Lobbying Skills Practical Workshop Room: 101
Trainer(s)	Andre Frankovits
Dinner 6:30	Indonesian Restaurant

	SUNDAY October 5
9:30–10:00	Meet in Staff Common Room Level 2, for morning tea
Morning 1 10:00–12:00	Advocacy Strategies from an activist Room: 101
Trainer(s)	Myint Cho
Lunch 12:00–12:30	
Afternoon 1 12:30–2:30	Community Influence and Legitimacy
Trainer(s)	Khaldoun Hajaj
Afternoon tea 2:30–2:45	
Afternoon 2 2:45–3:30	Certificate Presentation and Evaluation