

Facilitated Joint Brainstorming: An Indirect Intervention in Military Ruled Myanmar

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Abstract: *This paper deals with questions: How best the Facilitated Joint Brainstorming (FJB) workshop suggested by Roger Fisher, can be used to break the present deadlock of conflict in Burma? Can it be the useful tools to use in the Burma conflict? For a long time, the Burma's conflict is in the stage of "not moving forward". Both military leadership and political parties including ethnic groups are stuck in their position so hard that the formal possibilities of dialogue are minimal. The UN and international communities are tried to pressure the military regime to start formal dialogue for the restoration of Democracy and Human Rights, but it did not work yet. This paper tries to explore the possibilities of future dialogues between conflicting parties in Burma using the FJB.*

1. Introduction:¹

1.1 Physical Dimension:

Myanmar (formerly Burma) occupies the Thailand/Cambodia portion of the Indochinese Peninsula. India, China, Bangladesh, Laos, and Thailand are its neighbors. The Bay of Bengal touches the southwest coast. It has a land area of 678,500 sq. km. and 47,373,958 populations (2007 census). Its birth rate: 17.5/1000; infant mortality rate: 50.7/1000; life expectancy: 62.5; density per sq. mi: 187 and high literacy rate 83%. The capital of Myanmar, Rangoon is the largest city. The *Burman* ethnic group occupies 68% of the total population followed by the *Shan* 9%, the *Karen* 7%, the *Rakhine* 4%, and the rest from Chinese, Indian, and others. The major religion is Buddhist (89%). The remaining 11% is shared by Christianity, Islam and others.

1.2 Political History of Myanmar²:

The ethnic origins of modern Myanmar are a mixture of Indo-Aryans, who began pushing into the area around 700 B.C., and the Mongolian invaders. *Anawrahta* (1044–1077) was the first great unifier of Myanmar. In 1612, the British East India Company sent agents to Burma, but the Burmese doggedly resisted efforts of British, Dutch, and Portuguese traders to establish posts along the Bay of Bengal.

¹ From Infoplease; <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0107808.html>

² From Infoplease; <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0107808.html>

Through the Anglo-Burmese War in 1824–1826 and two subsequent wars, the British East India Company expanded to the whole of Burma. By 1886, Burma was annexed to India, and then became a separate colony in 1937. During World War II, Burma was a key battleground; the 800-mile Burma Road was the Allies' vital supply line to China. The Japanese invaded the country in Dec. 1941, and by May 1942, had occupied most of it, cutting off the Burma Road. After one of the most difficult campaigns of the war, Allied forces liberated most of Burma prior to the Japanese surrender in Aug. 1945.

1.3 Socio Economic condition:

It has GD/PPP (2005 est.) \$76.35 billions, per capita \$1700 (2005 est.), a growth rate of 1.5% and a high inflation rate of 25%. The economy is mainly based upon the export business. Their main exports are natural resources like petroleum, timber, tin, antimony, zinc, copper, tungsten, lead, coal, some marble, limestone, precious stones, natural gas, hydropower and some agricultural products, like rice, fish, etc. Burma produces 75% of the world's Teak. Their major trading partners are Thailand, India, China, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Malaysia, the US, UK, and France. Burma is rich in natural resources however, mismanagement and acute corruption in high-level military leaderships, has been made normal people's economic condition worse. The high per capita income of people, compared to other poor countries, does not reflect the people's condition of the country in a real sense. It is the poorest country in terms of GDP per capita of \$97 (2005 est.). Rural people, who comprise the majority of the population, suffer from a hard life. The private sector dominates in agriculture, light industry, and transport activities, while the military leaderships control mainly energy, heavy industry, and the rice trade.

1.4 Socio ethnic background:

The official government record shows that a total of 135 ethnic groups are living in the country and over 100 languages have been identified in Burma. The hills bordering the neighboring countries of India, Bangladesh, China, Laos and Thailand are inhabited by ethnic minorities. The largest of the ethnic minorities are the Shans, the Karens and the Arakanese. The Burmese are predominantly Buddhist, whereas the Karen and the Shan are predominantly Christian, and the

Arakanese are mix of Buddhists and Muslims. “Burmese adopted Buddhism from India from seventh century. Christianity was introduced during British rule, with the help of British missionaries, converting the Shan, the Karen and other ethnic minorities to the Christian faith.”³ The correlation of ethnicity and religion has intensified the divisions between ethnic groups in Myanmar.

1.5 Religious and Cultural Dimension:

The majority of Burmese people are Buddhist. According to the government, only 11% of people practice different religions other than Buddhism. Christianity is practiced by 4% of the population, out of which 80% are Protestants and the remaining 20% are Roman Catholics. Approximately 4% of the population is Muslim. Hinduism is practiced mainly by Burmese Indians and Nepalese. The Muslim and Christian populations are continuously facing religious persecution. The military leaderships are more aggressive against these religious groups. The Jews, once thousands in numbers, have been reduced to less than a hundred.

A diverse range of indigenous cultures exist in Burma; the majority culture is Buddhist and *Bamar*. *Bamar* culture has been influenced by the cultures of neighboring countries, which is manifested in its language, cuisine, music, dance and theatre. In a traditional Burmese village, the monastery is the centre of cultural life. Monks are respected and supported by the lay people. All boys of Buddhist family need to be a novice (beginner for Buddhism) before the age of 20. A novitiation ceremony called ‘*Shinbyu*’ is the most important events for a boy, when he enters to the monastery for a short period of time.⁴ Burmese is the official language of the country and is the mother tongue of *Bamar*.

1.6 Important Actors in the ongoing Conflict:

The Military Leaders, who have been in power since Myanmar’s independence, are unwilling to share power because they have complete access to the country’s huge natural resources. They are continuously accumulating wealth and capital for their personal use. They fear to lose this illegal access if a legitimate government would

³ http://www.aseanfocus.com/publications/history_myanmar.html

⁴ Khin Myo Chit (1980). *Flowers and Festivals Round the Burmese Year*.

rule the country. NLD, the Political party of the 1991 Nobel Prize winner *Aung San Suu Kyi*, is another main actor in the present conflict. They are predominantly responsible for most of the pro-democratic peaceful agitations and protests launched against the military ruling system. The newly emerging groups for the support of democratic norms and values, and peace are Buddhist Monks. They played a very prominent role in the September 2007 pro-democratic protests. The Diaspora community mainly residing as refugees in Thailand, India and other parts of world are the main supporters of the democratic movement. Some, who belong to the *Karen* ethnic community, are supporting the *Karen* independence movement. The role of regional organization in resolving conflict is less effective because of the personal interests of the some of the member countries. For example, Thailand, Singapore, China and India which are influential regional countries have natural resource interests in Myanmar. In addition, the multinational and state owned companies, who are involved in extracting natural resources for a nominal price, and without any international-biddings, are one of the main actors supporting the Military regime.

2. Present Political Situation:

Democratic rule ended in 1962, when General *Ne Win* led a military coup. Since then, military rule has continued. The current head of state is Senior General *Than Shwe*, who holds the chairman of SPDC, and ‘Commander in Chief of the Defense Service’. Out of the 39 member cabinet, 33 posts are held by military officers. The people are suffering from military rule in most of the time after independence. The military leaderships are ruling the country by the basis of exclusion. Kaldor analyzes the present warfare in the world, by saying, “The strategy is political control on the basis of exclusion – in particular, population displacement – and tactics for achieving this goal are terror and destabilization”⁵. People launched many peaceful movements (1974, 1988, 1991, 1994, 2003, 2004 and the recent in 2007) against all sorts of military terror. A new round of widespread pro-democracy protests, prompted by a sharp increase in

⁵ Kaldor, M., (2001). *New and Old War: organized Violence in a Global Era* P. 115

fuel prices, erupted throughout the country in August 2007. Participation in the peaceful protests increased over several weeks, and when Buddhist monks joined the protests, it created huge impact in the democratic movement. The peculiarity of this movement is very much different than any other people's movement of other part of world. This time leaders and most demonstrators of the pro-democracy movement are Buddhists Monks (as Buddhist, they are well-known as practitioners of passive resistance). The monks emerged as the leaders of the protest movement and gained national and international sympathy and support. On September 26, the military cracked down on the protesters, firing into crowds, raiding pagodas, and arresting monks. After almost two weeks of protest, the monks disappeared. The monasteries had been emptied. "The protests were observed as the largest in the country in 20 years, with as many as 100,000 people involved in the movement for democracy. The crackdown followed by killing of hundreds; thousands of casualties and arresting over 3000 protesters and detaining 2100+."⁶ A SENIOR Burmese intelligence official claims thousands of protester are dead and the bodies of hundreds of executed monks have been dumped in the jungle.⁷

In response to the recent military crackdown, the UN Secretary-General sent Special Envoy *Ibrahim Gambari* to Myanmar on Sep. 29. He conveyed serious concern over the undemocratic act of the military government in dealing with the peaceful protester. "Following *Gambari*'s report, the UN Security Council condemns "use of Violence" in Myanmar. The EU, the US, Australia and Japan have imposed economical sanctions."⁸

3. Causes of Conflict

3.1 Socio-Economical and ethnic cause:

⁶ Notte, J., Burma's biggest battle looms, Metro Wednesday, Oct. 17, 2007

⁷ <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,22515138-661,00.html>

⁸ <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5093&l=1>; Notte, J., Burma's biggest battle looms, Metro Wednesday, Oct. 17, 2007

The per capita income (\$1700) is high if we compare it to other poor third world countries but it is not the same for the rural people as those in urban slums. Their conditions are much worst. Lack of or-half the food of rural poor, lack of access to education and health facility, malnutrition and un/under-employment are common in these areas. Normal people do not have access to natural resources. The top ranked military leaders have ownerships to most of the natural resources. These frustrations show up sometimes in peaceful ways and sometimes in armed insurgencies.

In addition, the country has been severely affected by ethnic armed insurgencies mostly in rural areas, since its independence in 1948. In short, insurgency has remained endemic and, in many areas of Burma, the arm struggle virtually a way of life.⁹ The Military Junta, in the name of counter-insurgency activities, committed many of Human Rights Violation, “including forcible relocation, forced labor, torture, and extrajudicial killings”¹⁰. The government's efforts to assert control over ethnic border areas have emptied over 3,000 villages in a decade, an average of almost one village each day over the past ten years.¹¹ In recent years, the government was able to manage most of the ethnic insurgency group by giving them different kind of ‘Carrots’. By granting insurgent leaders lucrative business deals, such as timbers concessions, and by tolerating their drug trade, often in collusions with military, these cease-fire agreements proved a useful means for the government to consolidate its power in previously contested border regions.¹² However, some of the major insurgent groups of the *Shans* and the *Karens* still have not signed peace agreement to the government.

3.2 Identity Issues:

The identity issue is mainly related to the religious culture. The small minority groups, who are mostly Christian or Muslim, are always feared by the Buddhist

⁹ Smith, M., (1991) Burma: insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity P. 28; Zed Books

¹⁰ <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA160142001?open&of=ENG-MMR>

¹¹ http://www.witness.org/index.php?option=com_rightsalert&Itemid=178&task=view&alert_id=53

¹² Nitzschke, H. and Ballentine, K., Beyond Greed and Grievance: Policy Lessons from Studies in the Political Economy of Armed Conflict P. 11

community because of their religious and cultural identity. The government's policy of using (including medium of teaching Burmese language in schools) Burmese language in offices increased the fear of the minor ethnic group. On the other hand, the Burmese majority also suffer from psychological fear. The majority of people believe that Buddhism and related religious culture are their national identity. They think that the Christianity and Islam and their religious culture, which is supported by rich countries through missionaries and others, endangers their national identity. The military leaders are fueling this psychology for their political longevity.

3.3 Democracy and Human Rights:

Myanmar gained independence from British colonial rule in Jan. 4, 1948. In 1962, the left-wing general *Ne Win* staged a coup, banned political opposition, suspended the constitution, and introduced the "Burmese way of socialism." Myanmar has been ruled by military force in one form or another. The current regime (since 1992 Sr. Gen. *Than Shwe* has been head of state) has ruled since September 1988 after violently suppressing pro-democracy protests by the State Law and Order Council (SLORC). "The suppression leads to wide-scale arrests and killings of activists and declared martial law in 1989, imprisoning opposition National League for Democracy (NDL) leader, *Daw Aung San Suu Kyi*. The military refused to relinquish power after multiparty elections in 1990 which gave the NDL a decisive victory."¹³

The leader of the opposition, *Aung San Suu Kyi*, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, which focused world attention on SLORC's repressive policies. *Suu Kyi* remained under house arrest from 1989 until 1995. *Suu Kyi* continued to protest against the Military Junta. From 2000 to 2002, *Suu Kyi* was again placed under house arrest. In 2003, the government cracked down once again on the democracy movement, detaining *Suu Kyi* and shuttering NLD headquarters. She has remained in government custody since 2003. Therefore political conflicts have been the main

¹³ <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5093&l=1>; Myanmar Backgrounder: Ethnic Minority Politics, Asia Report No. 52, 7 May 2003

hindrance to peoples' use of their democratic rights, Human Rights violation, prohibiting peoples to involve in political process, blocking any peaceful protests or voice, if it goes against the government, etc.

3.4 Resource and economic Interest of Military Junta Leaders and some International Actors:

The main interest behind supporting directly or indirectly the Myanmar regime is the huge natural resources of the country. Some countries are involved directly through their state-run corporation and some are involved through private companies. The military rulers share access and ownership to Burma's natural resources with multinational companies.

At present, the total international companies working in Burma are 127+. The main stake holders of natural resources like Oil/Gas/Mine/Timber are India, China, UK, USA, Japan, Canada, Singapore and France. There are all together 20 countries that are getting profit from the military rulers from different types of businesses. The military regimes are getting foreign currency to buy the necessary arms and ammunitions and run the country as they wish. This regime is indirectly supported by these companies, and directly supported by China and India, whose state share in the Oil and Gas resources exploration is a major one. These two countries and other companies are more concerned for their profit and future business, which they get without any competition. They acquire these businesses on the basis of an understanding between military ruler's self interest and their own economical interest. It shows that 20 countries are directly or indirectly responsible for the prolongation of the military dictatorship. Burma's natural gas reserves, controlled by the Burmese regime in partnership with the U.S. multinational oil giant Chevron, the French oil company Total, Thai oil firm, India state owned oil companies GAIL and ONGC *Videsh* and China state owned companies CNOOC and CNPC are the main profiteers from the ongoing conflict of Myanmar. According to Amy Goodman, Chevron's Pipeline is the Burmese Regime's Lifeline.¹⁴ It is interesting

¹⁴ http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/20071002_chevrons_pipeline_is_the_burmese_regimes_lifeline/

to note that the Chevron is the company where the present foreign secretary Rice served as the board director for a decade. Therefore the US economic sanction against Burma does not work. It is nothing other than the show business. As long as the 'financial godfathers' like Chevron, Total Oil, Gail, CNOOC and other exist for the Burmese regime, there is no question of any economic sanction, which works to pressurize the regime.

4. Role of Different Actors:

There are different stake holders, who play important roles in the present conflict of Burma. The National League for democracy, the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, the National Unity Party (supported by Military regime in 1990 election), the Union Solidarity and Development Association (supported by Military leaders) and other small parties representing ethnic minorities are political actors. The civil society institutions in Burma are weak. Most of the registered institutions are either supporters or followers of present regime. However, some of them like students and youth organizations are very strong even not registered. The religious institutions of Buddhist Monks are most strong and widely respected by the peoples of Burma. Monks are active for the restoration of democracy since a long time. They also fought against British colonial rules. Out of 135 ethnic groups, the *Karens* and the *Shan* ethnic groups are fighting for their own independence, since 1949. Some of them involve in arm insurgency. The military regime is continuously suppressing them, in the context of its counter-insurgency activities. There are other small ethnic groups, some are fighting against the present regime for the democracy and ethnic rights, and on the hand some have signed peace agreements to military leader.

There are mainly two types of Burmese living abroad. The first category is those who are politically harassed and exiled, and another is those who left the country for economic reasons. More than half a million Burmese refugees live in camps on

the country's borders.¹⁵ The Diaspora communities mainly reside in Thailand, The US, Germany, Bangladesh, and other countries. The politically active Diaspora has developed special networks among them. Many of them have joined/developed Human Rights organizations in Europe and America. There is a difference in opinion between the Diaspora on the issues of the *Karen* and the *Shan*'s demand of independence. However, most of them are playing supporting role for the democratic movement in side Burma.

5. Political and International organizations, and previous intervention attempts:

In 1961, *U Thant*, then Burma's Permanent Representative to the UN and former Secretary to the Prime Minister, was elected Secretary General of the UN and served for ten years. At that time, the Nobel Prize winner *Aung San Suu Kyi* worked for the Secretary General. Those were the times, when Burma had excellent relations to the UN. After capturing the power by Military Junta, the relations have been continuously deteriorating with the UN and other international organizations. As the protest rise, since 1988 for democracy, international organizations started pressurizing the regime in different forms. In 2006 a divided United Nations General Assembly voted through a resolution that strongly called upon the government of Burma to end its systematic violations of Human Rights.¹⁶ In January 2007, Russia and China vetoed a draft resolution before the UN Security Council calling on the government of Burma to respect human rights and begin a democratic transition.¹⁷ The issues had been forced onto the agenda against the veto by the US claiming that the outflow from Burma of refugees, drugs, HIV-AIDS, and other diseases threatened international peace and security. Following the uprising on September 2007, the UN and many other influential countries have shown strong opinion against Burma's regime. "The Bush administration announced that 14

¹⁵ <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/burma601/timeline.html>

¹⁶ [United Nations General Assembly Verbatim Report meeting 84 session 61](#) page 14 on [22 December 2006](#) at 10:00 (ret. 2007-09-25)

¹⁷ [United Nations Security Council Document 14 S-2007-14](#) on [12 January 2007](#) (ret. 2007-09-25)

senior officials in Myanmar would be subject to sanctions. Those targeted include the junta leader, Senior Gen. *Than Shwe*, and the No. 2 man, Deputy Senior Gen. *Maung Aye*. The action freezes any assets the 14 have in U.S. banks or other financial institutions under U.S. jurisdiction, and also prohibits any U.S. citizens from doing business with those individuals. European Union diplomats agreed to consider imposing more economic sanctions on Myanmar. Sanctions were first imposed in 1996 and include a ban on travel to Europe for top government officials, an assets freeze and a ban on arms sales to Myanmar. Australian Prime Minister John Howard said his government would also press Beijing to urge the junta to end its violent repression.”¹⁸

But, in support of the Burmese regime, Singapore has banned all outdoor protest at a summit of ASEAN. However, frequently this ban is crushed by Burmese youth. In recent day, on Nov 19, 2007, a group of international student at Singapore universities sought to defy a ban protest with a banner written “Stop Arrests and Killings Monks” in the city-state on Monday, calling for democracy in Myanmar at a summit of ASEAN.¹⁹

On June 23, 1997, Burma was admitted into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In the annual ASEAN Summit in January 2007, held in Philippines, foreign ministers asked Burma to make greater progress on its roadmap toward democracy and national reconciliation.²⁰ Recently after the September 2007 crackdown, The ASEAN ministers called for the release of all political prisoners, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate *Aung San Suu Kyit*.

6. Intervention Strategies

6.1 Facilitated Joint Brainstorming:

¹⁸ <http://www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/asiapcf/09/27/myanmar.pressure.ap/index.html>

¹⁹ Qing, K.G., <http://burmanewsandarticles.blogspot.com/2007/11/students-defy-burma-protest-ban-at.html>

²⁰ Tarrant, Bill. "[ASEAN leaders weigh charter, wrangle over Myanmar](#)", Reuters, 2007-01-13. Retrieved on [2007-01-13](#).

As discussed above, the conflict of Burma is in the stage of ‘not moving forward’. Out of many actors, the three major actors: the military leaderships, the main political party - NLD and the two ethnic minority groups are the central focus of the conflict. There have been no formal dialogues between conflicting parties, since a long time. The attempts by international organizations including the UN, have not worked yet to initiate formal negotiation, particularly between the military rulers and the NLD. Both of them and the two major conflicting ethnic groups are stuck in their position so hard that the formal possibilities of dialogue are minimal. The pressure from international and regional organizations such as the UN and ASEAN were not able to break the deadlock between them. In this stage, one has to search other possibilities, so that the present deadlock can be broken and the process of dialogue can be started. Out of several options, the Integrated Problem Solving Workshop (IPS) suggested by Prof. Kelman and Facilitated Joint Brainstorming (FJB) suggested by Prof. Roger Fisher are widely used to break the deadlock in the case of protracted conflict. Both have their own advantages and disadvantages. It is most important for the coexistence intervener to determine, which one might be best suited for the particular conflict.

IPS – as manifested particularly in problem-solving workshops – is an academically based, unofficial third-party approach, bringing together representatives of parties in conflict for direct communication.²¹ In IPS, mediators are not a traditional type rather they just act as facilitators. They neither propose nor impose solutions. Their main focus is “to facilitate the process whereby solutions will emerge out of the interaction between the parties themselves” (Kelman 2002). The IPS is derived from the work of John Burton’s Four Basic Human Needs Theory²²:

²¹ Kelman, H.C. (2002). Interactive Problem-solving Informal Mediation by the Scholar-Practitioner; In J. Bercovitch (Ed.), *Studies in International mediation: Essays in honor of Jeffery Z. Rubin* P. 165

²² http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/human_needs/; Also see Burton, J.W. in *The International Journal of Peace Studies* Vol. 3

- (1) Security - the need for structure, predictability, stability, and freedom from fear and anxiety,
- (2) Belonging - the need to be accepted by others and to have strong personal ties with one's family, friends, and identity groups, and the need to be recognized by oneself and others as well as the need to reach one's potential in all areas of life,
- (3) Identity - goes beyond a psychological "sense of self", cultural security and Freedom and
- (4) Growth – economic and other infrastructure growth.

In the process of an IPS workshop, the above human needs are emphasized in the discussions, because these are the basic important issues of all human beings. It is observed that the Kelman's IPS workshop is best suited for those conflict, where:

- (i) The conflict is deeply rooted in religious, cultural and political belief.
- (ii) Breakage of formal and informal talks between conflicting parties.
- (iii) High risk for the members of both parties to express their formal views publicly.
- (iv) No cross information between the communities.

Here the participants for the workshop are those who must be influential but do not hold formal positions within conflicting parties. This IPS workshop has been exercised for the Middle East Israel-Palestine conflict time and again. However, the main deficiency of IPS is its end result: It always focuses on the communication and relation building between the non-formal and non-official influencing peoples. After the workshop what next? What will be the future programs? Do they come close to any alternative solutions? These are the points where IPS becomes weak.

The present conflict of Burma is different than the Israel-Palestine conflict. Often informal but 'not secret' talks are being held. The military regime and NLD have similar views on national integrity and the country's nationalism and

sovereignty. They have same views against the independence of the *Karen* and *Shan* state. However, they differ in the issues of people's democratic rights, inclusion of the ethnic minorities in the main stream politics and nationality related to religion and culture. Here, the formal or informal dialogues between different actors do not threaten individuals. "As in FJB, influential members of the parties come together to generate creative options on both substance and process that may improve the situation and relationship, with the help of third party facilitators. In addition, participants have no authority to commit anybody to anything at any time during these deliberations."²³ The FJB is best suited for those conflicts where formal and informal people (officials of government can also participate individually) from different areas can be the participants of the workshop. In this workshop, different influential actors from the conflicting parties including academicians can be the participants. Therefore it covers all sectors of society. In addition, the possibilities to generate different creative options may support the future peace building process. Since, the FJB option is broader and effective in the case of the Burma conflict in general; therefore it is suggested to use this tool for addressing the protracted conflict of Burma. In the case of Border conflict of Ecuador and Peru, Roger Fisher used these techniques to build the relationship.

A feature of this FJB technique is the use of "training as intervention" – the use of negotiation training itself as a vehicle to build bridges among parties in conflict. Training activities – negotiation exercises, simulations, game, role-playing, etc. – not related to the substance of the conflict are used not only to build negotiation skills in the participants, but to develop relationships at a personal level.²⁴

This relationship will be very important to create and work on different options and follow-up in the future. The FJB workshop will be initiated by a neutral

²³ Fisher, R., Kopelman, E. and Schneider, A. K., quotes on Reifenberg, S. and Cervenak, C. in FJB: A Case Study of the Ecuador-Peru Border Dispute P. 2

²⁴ Reifenberg, S. and Cervenak, C. in FJB: A Case Study of the Ecuador-Peru Border Dispute P. 2-3

third party. In this case, the CMG of Harvard University or the Coexistence and Conflict program of Brandeis University may play a third party role. The selection of the participants is very important, as it directly affects the results of the workshop. Before selection, a conflict map should be drawn to know the relation between different actors of the conflict. As shown in the figure-1, the main actors of conflict are the military regime, NLD, Institution of religious Monks, two ethnic groups Karen and Shan, Diaspora communities, regional organization ASEAN and the UN. The multinational companies from Thailand, India, China, Singapore, the US, UK, France and other 13 countries are also major actor, whose businesses support the Burmese military regime economically. The FJB workshop cannot be arranged at one-go because of so many actors in the conflict. Therefore it should be done in 4-5 different sessions with different groups. Each session should have 12 to 16 persons in total from 2 to 3 different groups.

The goals of the FJB are to have the participants do the following:²⁵

- Improve communication and form effective working relationships between them;
- Learn how to approach the conflict as a joint problem;
- Develop a common vocabulary and framework for dealing with differences;
- Learn to identify the interests and perceptions of both sides;
- Generate some creative options for moving forward on process and substance; and
- Develop a strategy for sharing the results of the session with decision makers in each country.

Later the participants are encouraged to share those ideas and options with official policy makers and negotiators back in Burma. Their assignment would be to draft and analyze alternatives that could perhaps provide the bases for choices the official negotiators would eventually address.²⁶ There are several

²⁵ Reifenberg, S. and Cervenak, C. in FJB: A Case Study of the Ecuador-Peru Border Dispute P. 3

²⁶ Fisher, R. and Bolling, L. Facilitated Joint Brainstorming; CMG, Harvard University

preparations, which should be done before the FJB workshop takes place. Choosing appropriate participants from each side, building an effective team and allies in each country to support the FJB process, and preparing official channels to receive and follow-up on the result of the exercise are all critical ingredients if the ideas generated are to be useful and taken seriously by policy makers (Reifenberg 1996, P. 5). A critical ingredient is to involve appropriate participants who are open, creative, knowledgeable about the major interests and stakeholders involved in the conflict, and influential in their respective communities.²⁷ In addition, key persons of both military rulers, NLD and other concerned institutions will be informed of the workshop, its ground rules and its goals. The major ground rules include: participants speaking for themselves, no official representation, everyone are attending on their own personal capacity, no expectation of agreement, no personal attacks, third party as facilitator (not mediator) and the confidentiality of the spoken ideas during the workshop. These points are to be circulated before the workshop takes place. The participants can make other minor rules during the workshop itself. To make the relationship better between the participants and encourage creativity, a wide range of entertaining and creative exercises should be introduced, such as arm exercise, the “Coca-Coca” exercise, oil pricing exercise, the card game exercise, Four-Quadrant Analysis, etc. should be done in the process of workshop as suggested by Fisher²⁸. In addition, the Currently-Perceived Choices of each conflicting parties (CPC)²⁹ suggested by Roger Fisher, will be completed by each participant. This will help the participants to understand the other’s point of view. In addition, role-playing as members of opposing parties also helps facilitate understanding of conflicting opinions.

²⁷ Fisher, R., Criteria for Selecting Facilitated Joint Brainstorming Participants; CMG, Harvard University

²⁸ To know the detailed about the exercise please refer to FJB: A Case Study of the Ecuador-Peru Border Dispute; Also see Specific Illustrative Activities developed by Fisher and Fitzgerald (1999), CMG Harvard University

²⁹ Fisher, R and Fitzgerald, K.M. (1999); Facilitated Joint Brainstorming: Generating Options to Overcome Deadlock; CMG, Harvard University.

In the process of brainstorming, dozens of interesting ideas emerge. However, the difficult part of the workshop is to narrow down those all ideas and alternative options to a certain workable limit. In the end of workshop, an explicit discussion should be done on the issue of how best the ‘follow up’ of workshop can be made? How can these new ideas and options be injected back into the formal process most effectively. And what role can the participants play for the formal start of the negotiation process?

6.2 Going forward After Workshop

After the FJB workshop, those workable options and ideas can be made available to the concerned actors in the name of the third party; for instance, the CMG or Brandeis University may develop a book and release it. This may help the concern actors reposition their previous stance in a more positive direction. The third party should continue their relationship with all of the participants and try to help them intellectually. On the other hand, the participant-help can also be fruitful for finalizing the participants for next FJB sessions. The FJB workshop may be needed even after the post-peace agreement to humanize the relation between long standing conflicting actors.

7. Conclusions and recommendations:

The present situation of the Burma conflict is a stalemate or “the situation of not moving forward”. The direct dialogue has been stopped for a long time. The military dictatorship is showing a hard position and extending the situation as much as they can. At the context of each big protest and people’s uprising, they show the world that they are interested in dialogues, and often they make dialogues with the main opposition party and their leaders. But, as time passes and the heat of the protests cools down, again the military dictator return to their earlier antagonistic position. Therefore, at this moment of power structure in Burma, there are two options: (1) The withdrawal or suspension of 11 major international companies (including Chinese and Indian) working in the natural resource sector of Burma, which are major sources fueling the military leadership, and regional as well as international pressure for fruitful negotiations. This option is less threatening to people’s lives and is face-saving survival

for the military leaders too. The negotiation and mediation start from this option. (2) If the first option does not work in a couple of years, then the peoples' power in the form of peaceful and/or armed forces, will ultimately win the game, but with a greater cost of life, damage to societal values and norms, and the destruction of essential infrastructures. The present huge involvement of monks and their institutions in the pro-democracy movements indicates this probability. The devastating impacts of this option are not limited to Burma but spill over into neighboring countries and to international communities as in the form of refugees, as disease, security threats as cycles of violence, and actions and reactions.

As a coexistence practicener, we cannot leave the situation as it is. Someone has to intervene. There is less chance that option one will work, because of the economic interest of military leaders and powerful regional and international actors such as China, India, Thailand, Singapore, UK, France and the US as well as their respective multinational companies. The second option is more dangerous and involves more potential for violent conflict. Therefore, the present situation justifies the possible intervention, which is the Facilitated Joint Brainstorming Workshop suggested by Roger Fisher. In this workshop, influential representatives from all the concerned conflicting parties are gathered, trained and humanized, and during the process, cross-party relations will be developed. Later their positive role may help to change the past position of the parties. This attempt will help to break the present "no talk" situation in Burma. Of course, this process may take a couple of years to generate the results, but that is not long compared to the 45 year history of the present Burmese conflict. Let us hope the seven concerned countries will genuinely pressure the present military regime of Burma to initiate dialogues with the political parties and the ethnic minority. If not hopefully Brandeis or CMG-Harvard University will take initiative using FJB-workshop to create the environment for the negotiation between the conflicting parties in Burma.

Submitted by:

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