

Martens slams "flagrant violation" of EU visa ban

Brussels, May 16, 2001

EPP President Wilfried MARTENS today registered protests with the Swedish Presidency of the EU, European Commissioner Chris PATTEN, and German Chancellor Gerhard SCHRÖDER, over the issuing of a visa to a visiting minister from the military junta in Burma. "What exactly is the point of Agreed Positions on such matters if we don't respect them?" Martens demanded.

The visa was granted by the German authorities to U SOE THA, the Burmese junta's Minister of Planning, who arrived in Europe via Germany. U Soe Tha is currently attending the Least Developed Nations Conference in Brussels.

"The junta, the so-called State Peace and Development Council, has just one aim, and that is to silence the chorus of international criticism and stop economic sanctions against them," said Martens. "It is a flagrant violation of agreed principles to help them to do this. U Soe Tha even figures by name on the blacklist.

"I agree entirely with Dr SEIN WIN [*the elected, but exiled, prime minister of Burma*] that this is completely wrong. This is not a normal visiting minister from a normal elected government, but the functionary of one of the most brutal dictatorships in the world. Anyone who has the slightest interest in the region knows of widespread forced labour, terrible human rights abuses against ethnic minorities, economic mismanagement on the grand scale, and brazen complicity in the international drugs trade.

"It is naive to suppose that some good can be achieved by talking to a messenger-boy from such a narco-dictatorship. And it is not just a waste of time, but an insult to those democratically elected persons who have come to the conference in good faith to try to address the real issues. Not the least of those is the extreme poverty to which the SPDC - inheritors of the catastrophic vision of the Burmese Road to Socialism - have reduced what used to be one of the most prosperous countries in Asia."

The National League for Democracy won 80% of the vote in the 1990 free elections. The NLD's leader AUNG SANG SUU KYI is currently under house arrest, and her supporters and MPs are harassed, detained, and tortured. Restoring democracy to Burma forms part of the EPP's 1999-2004 Action Programme, and has been the subject of regular resolutions both by the EPP and the Christian Democrat International.