

## **Burma Resolution in Security Council, vetoed by Russia and China: Implications for R2P**

On 12 January 2007, the UN Security Council met to discuss the situation in Burma (Myanmar). The members of the Council voted on a draft resolution presented by the United Kingdom and the United States. The peaceful resolution called for:

- The government of Burma to offer unhindered access to humanitarian organizations
- The government of Burma to cooperate fully with the International Labor Organizations
  
- The government of Burma to make concrete progress toward democracy, by engaging in a substantive political dialogue with all political parties
- The government of Burma to release of all political prisoners, including Nobel Peace Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi
- Support for the Secretary-Generals good offices mission in Burma

The voting was as follows:

**9 votes in favor:** Belgium, France, Ghana, Italy, Panama, Peru, Slovakia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America.

**3 votes against:** China, Russian Federation, South Africa

**3 abstaining:** Congo, Indonesia, Qatar

Although 9 votes were in favor of the US/UK backed Resolution, the 3 votes against the resolution included two of the permanent members of the Council. Both the Russian Federation and China voted against the Resolution, using their veto power to immediately turn down the Resolution. This is the first time since 1989 that multiple vetoes have been used in the Council.

Members of the Council had the opportunity to speak before and after the vote. A Representative from Burma joined the Security Council in its discussion. In statements made to the Council, Russia and China argued that Burma did not pose a threat to peace and security in the region, and that the internal affairs of the state did not have a place within the Security Council. While they agreed Burma is facing a serious human rights and humanitarian situation, they argued that other bodies, such as the Human Rights Council, should hear these concerns (the governments of South Africa and Congo agreed). At the same time, several representatives who voted in favor of the resolution spoke in favor of the Security Council being the appropriate venue for discussion of massive human rights violations that occur within a state. These statements are excerpted below.

Statements of Council Members raised the question of the role of the Council in responding to an intra-state situation where populations are at the risk of large-scale violence. The doctrine of responsibility to protect asserts that the Council is prepared on a case by case basis to adopt measures to protect a population from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing when a state manifestly fails to protect its population. Yet members objected to

the resolution on the grounds that this is an internal affair or one best left to the Human Rights Council. If Myanmar is not an example of crimes against humanity or war crimes where the Council should be seized, then when would this responsibility be triggered? Could the Council establish mechanisms to make this determination?

To view excerpts from government statements, [click here](#)