

## FROM PALESTINE TO MAYANMAR

THE JUNTA OF MAYANMAR HAS just renewed the house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi, bringing the thirteenth year. A doctor has not been allowed to visit her since January though her house was damaged in the recent cyclone Nargis. And yet the secretary-general of the United Nations Ban ki-Moon, could not bring himself to utter her name on his recent tour of cyclone-ravaged Mayanmar. It is as if her very name has become an embarrassment for those who claim to represent the "international community."

Where are the voices of those in governments and their related institutions who know how to help Mayanmar? Where are the honest brokers who once eased the oppressed away from their shadows, the true and talented peacemakers who see societies not in terms of their usefulness to "interests" but as victims of it?

The answer is simple. They are all but extinguished by a virus called the "war on terror". Where once men and women of good heart and good intellect and good faith stood in parliaments and world bodies in defence of the human rights of others, there is now cowardice. Last year, 100 eminent British doctors pleaded with the British minister for international development, then Hillary Benn for emergency medical aid to be sent to Iraqi children's hospitals: "Babies are dying for want of a 95 pence oxygen mask," they wrote. The minister turned them down flat.

But medical aid for children is exactly the kind of assistance the western governments now insist the Mayanmar junta should accept without delay. "There are people suffering in Burma," said an indignant Gordon Brown, "there are children going without food ... it is utterly unacceptable that when international aid is offered, the regime will try to prevent that getting in."

As scores of children in Shia areas of Baghdad are blown to bits by America and what the BBC calls Iraq's "democratic government", the so-called international community is silent, as ever. They say nothing while Israel torments and starves the children of Gaza, ignoring every attempt to bring a ceasefire with Hamas, all in the name of a crusade that dares not say its name.

The "war on terror" allows Australia and Israel to train Mayanmar's internal security establishments. It consumes most humanitarian aid indirectly and the very internationalism capable of bringing the "clever" pressure on the Junta, about which Aung San Suu Kyi once spoke. Dismissing the idiocy of a military intervention in her country, she asked, "What about all those who trade with the generals, who give them many millions of dollars that keep them going?" She was referring to the huge oil and gas companies, *Total* and *Chevron*, which effectively hand the regime \$2.7 billion a year, and the Halliburton company (former CEO Vice President Cheney) that backed the construction of the Yadana pipeline, and the many British travel companies that send tourists across bridges and roads built with forced labour.

The BBC, in contravention of its charter, has just bought 75 percent of Lonely Planet travel guides, a truculent defender of Britain's right to tourists in

Myanmar regardless of slave-labour, or cyclones, or the woman beyond the trip wire. □ *[contributed]*