

UK TOUR OPERATORS BREACH EU REGULATION



EU regulation bans business contacts with Burmese tourism facilities that are connected to the military regime. Some UK tour operators, however, do not respect this regulation.

Tourism Concern, an independent organization that fights exploitation in tourism, claims over 24 UK tour operators have business links to Burmese tourism facilities linked to the repressive military junta. The organization warns that as a consequence the industry generates funds for the country's regime. **Some of the tourism resorts are said to have been built by slave labor.** Because of the construction of these resorts people allegedly lost their homes and were forcibly displaced with no or just minimum compensation.

The EU has included some of the Burmese resorts that are connected to the junta on a black list. The UK government, however, failed to correctly implement this European Council's Regulation and therefore it is not possible to punish the UK companies for not respecting it. Some of the **tour operators claim they did not even know about such a ban.** The regulation forbids to knowingly provide direct or indirect financial benefits to the regime or regime associates.

The **Burmese tourism industry** is a slowly developing sector of the country's economy yet it is an important source of revenue for the government. The government is also the main developer in this area, nevertheless, there are also private businesses as well as foreign investors involved. In 2007 the industry generated US\$182 million.

Not everyone is, however, keen on further isolating the country. A charity group called Network Myanmar opposes the idea. According to Network Myanmar leader Derek Tonkin tourism industry helps people in Burma to fight poverty by creating jobs. They also believe that further development of tourism would help to provoke a democratic reform in Burma. There comes the dilemma, should we take job opportunities from the Burmese people to punish their cruel leaders?

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