

Myanmar must face up to junta crimes, U.N. envoy says

(Reuters) - [Myanmar](#) must pursue crimes committed by the former junta but neither the quasi-civilian government nor opposition led by Aung San Suu Kyi have any appetite to do so for now, a [United Nations](#) investigator said on Friday.



Tomas Ojea Quintana, U.N. special envoy on human rights in Myanmar, meets with Myanmar pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi (R) in Suu Kyi's home in Yangon February 16, 2013, in this picture provided by NLD.
Credit: Reuters/NLD/Handout

By Stephanie Nebehay
GENEVA | Fri Mar 8, 2013 3:18pm EST

(Reuters) - [Myanmar](#) must pursue crimes committed by the former junta but neither the quasi-civilian government nor opposition led by Aung San Suu Kyi have any appetite to do so for now, a [United Nations](#) investigator said on Friday.

Tomas Ojea Quintana, U.N. special rapporteur on human rights in [Myanmar](#), said accountability for decades of violations was crucial for healing as well as for solidifying reforms.

The military regime stands accused of having used forced labor, suppressing ethnic minorities and killings and torture by its troops and police.

Ojea Quintana, asked about prospects of a truth commission or prosecutions, said: "The reality is that in Myanmar, this is not on the agenda of any of the stakeholders. It's not on the government agenda, it's not on the other political parties agenda and it's not on the ethnic minority groups agenda."

The independent U.N. investigator, speaking to a news briefing in Geneva, held talks with senior officials in Myanmar as well as Suu Kyi during his latest visit last month.

Suu Kyi's inexperienced party began its first congress on Friday aiming to push forward positions that will become increasingly important in the run-up to a 2015 election that could sweep it into government.

On Thursday, Ojea Quintana said in an annual report that the crisis in Rakhine state, where sectarian violence erupted last year, risks spreading and endangering democratic reforms undertaken since military rule ended in 2011.

The government of President Thein Sein, a former junta general, has international obligations to face "serious crimes and systematic human rights abuses", he said.

"But in Myanmar there is not any possibility at this moment to start even a discussion on this. I think that there is a religious component in the middle as well, in terms of believing in forgiveness and looking to the future and not into the past," he said, referring to the majority Buddhist country.

LEARNING FROM THE PAST

Noting that his native [Argentina](#) had emerged from a military dictatorship in the 1980s, Ojea Quintana said:

"I really believe that at some point there will be a need for healing of what happened in the past ... We need to keep sending the message that this is also very important for any transition to become successful to learn from the past.

"To learn from the past you need to understand what happened and not just to act as if nothing had happened in Myanmar that had a military regime for more than 40 years."

Ojea Quintana said Myanmar was lobbying member states of the U.N. Human Rights Council to end his mandate, which currently goes to May 2014. He felt continuing scrutiny was needed.

Foreign investors seeking opportunities in mineral-rich Myanmar should ensure their operations have a positive impact, ranging from ensuring workers' rights to avoiding "land grabs".

"The international community is now facing a kind of tension between two kinds of interests. There is a strong interest in economics and lots of countries all over the world right now want to start doing [business](#) with Myanmar. We welcome that because it might bring development," he said.

"At the same time, the international community needs to follow U.N principles on human rights, to remember human rights are at the core of any transition, development and economic process."

(Reporting by Stephanie Nebehay; Editing by Sophie Hares)