

CONCERT BRINGS LIGHT TO BURMA

From the roots of the conflict: an exiled journalist speaks

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Min Zin found himself running for his life and then exiled from his country after he launched a nation-wide student union at his high school in 1989.

At UCLA, students are free to form unions or organizations to promote their heritage, stand for a cause or protest the unjust. In Zin's country, Burma, exercising this basic human right to expression is considered a felony.

"If you are a member of a student union, according to the law you will be arrested and imprisoned for four years minimum," said Zin, now a Burmese journalist at Mighty Mic's Human Rights Awareness Concert: Benefit for Burma. "In Burma, the student union is illegal."

Invited to tell his story at the concert, which was held at UCLA's Ackerman Grand Ballroom on April 21, Zin spoke about how his political efforts protesting the military regime in Burma have forced him to live life as a fugitive. Since 1989, he has been in hiding from the Burmese government. He has since then found refuge in the United States, but his efforts to bring awareness to the struggles for human rights in this Southeast Asian country have not stopped.

"I'll definitely tell my colleagues in Burma, 'Don't worry. UCLA is linking arms with us.' Please use your liberty to promote ours," said Zin, who revealed at the concert that almost every member of his family has been arrested because of his cause. Many of his friends and fellow students who allied with him have also

been killed.

"In Burma, the military shoots bullets into student crowds," said Zin.

Any type of demonstration in Burma, even the peaceful ones, is illegal and those who participate are subject to imprisonment and persecution. Buddhist monks of the All-Burma Monks Alliance have experienced this violence firsthand. Pyinya Zawta, Gawsaita, and Agga Nya were among those that attended the concert.

The religious leaders of the Saffron Revolution are known to demonstrate peacefully against the military government, which has deprived its citizens of sufficient food and healthcare. As they sat on the stage of the Ballroom, safe from the persecution they would face in Burma, a slideshow of photographs showed images of Gawsaita's bleeding head, a dead monk facedown in water, and civilians hiding while bullets flew through the air.

Attendees were shown these vivid images and other videos about Burma throughout the concert, which featured performances from Blackalicious, Daphne Loves Derby and Audible Mainframe. The concert was free to UCLA students, but signs of support for the cause became evident throughout the night as students donated money and purchased "Free Burma" T-shirts and raffle tickets for the cause.

Mighty Mic's third annual concert, an event not possible in Burma, raised \$3,000 for Doctors Without Borders and the U.S. Campaign for Burma.



PHOTO BY CLAUDIA LI

Gawsaita, a Burmese monk, is often dubbed as "The Face of the Saffron Revolution" and makes multiple media appearances to bring awareness to the conflict in Burma.

Q&A with PAN-ASIAN QUEERS by RAY LUO

Pan-Asian Queers (PAQ) is a safe haven on the UCLA campus for queer Asian Pacific Islander students. We sat down with a panel of officers from PAQ to discuss the goals and progress made by the organization, as well as the current political and social environment for API queers.

PAQ: It's a much less accepting environment, because we also suffer from the model minority myth that we have all these high expectations placed on us by family and society to succeed, and anything that deviates from the norm is deemed a failure. Asian cultures can be inherently homophobic, because they tend to be traditional and hierarchical, so gender roles tend to be very well defined.

PT: Do you think Asian cultures are more or less accepting of being queer?

PAQ: We're a minority within a minority, being Asian and queer. That intersecting idea of identity is something that isn't addressed in other groups. APIs get lumped into a group even though they have their own issues of interest.

PAQ: The majority should not be able to vote on the fate of a minority. Until the courts rule on this issue, Prop 8 is still undecided. It looks like more Americanized APIs have an easier time accepting our sexuality. Prop 8 shows that we're not making as much progress as we thought, but a lot of support for equal rights came out, so that's encouraging.

In the 2008 general election, voters in California approved Proposition 8, which changed the state Constitution to define marriage as a union between opposite-sex couples.

PT: What is different about PAQ compared to other queer organizations on campus?

PT: How do you think Prop 8 has changed the political outlook for gay rights?

PT: Are your parents accepting of your sexual orientation? Have you come out? How have they handled your coming out?

PAQ: A lot of us have come out here, but not at home. It's all up to the individual. Some of us have families from rural Vietnam with very conservative views. Others have tested the waters by asking them about Prop 8 during phone banking.

PT: How did you feel when Prop 8 was passed?

PAQ: In the beginning, when we were campaigning against the Prop 8 people, it was very unifying and inspiring. But when Prop 8 was passed, we were in mourning... I was crying for several days, and felt betrayed by my state and my home. There was massive defriending going on facebook when I realized certain friends had voted yes.