

## Rambo: A Cry for Freedom

Sylvester Stallone's latest *Rambo* film, set in Burma, has been slated by critics who accuse it of shallow, "good guys v. bad guys" morality and excessive, gratuitous violence. But a Burmese student living in England witnesses here to the real encouragement it has given to those in his country who continue to resist a brutal and oppressive regime.

In this, the fourth *Rambo* film, John Rambo, a Vietnam war veteran, tries for once to live a quiet life in northern Thailand as a snake-catcher but, unable to resist the call of his old profession, he risks his life ferrying American missionaries across the border into the war-torn area of eastern Burma. When he hears the missionaries have been kidnapped, he jumps to their rescue without a moment's hesitation.

At one point, when the mercenaries and Rambo see a plundered village with corpses and carcasses scattered all over the place, one of the mercenaries, from fear of being outnumbered, suggests they should turn back. But Rambo says, "Live for nothing... or die for something. Your call." Contrary to what many critics have said, I think Stallone is a winner in making *Rambo*, for that line of his has been reiterated by many Burmese both inside and outside the country. Many in the country have even risked long prison sentences to see the film. *Rambo* has become a source of inspiration for the struggle for freedom, democracy and equality in Burma. At least for now...

Right at the start of the film, one or two minutes of news clips are used to present a summary of the political, social and human rights situation in Burma, a south east Asian nation which has been under military rule for more than 40 years. Those flash pictures from the clips convey



information about the systematic ethnic cleansing offensives against the Karens, Karennis and Shans in the eastern part of Burma, as well as the Buddhist monk-led demonstration in September 2007 and the subsequent killings and imprisonments of monks and activists.

As a Burmese, knowing what is going on in the country, I feel that *Rambo* plays an important part in the campaign to raise the world's awareness of what's happening there – racial discrimination, ethnic elimination and the use of sexual abuse and rape by Burmese soldiers as weapons of war against ethnic minorities.

This fourth *Rambo* film is unlike the first three; it is strikingly reflective of the atrocious dictatorship of one of the world's most notorious fascists and human rights violators – who is not anti-West, as many perceive, but is anti-public, anti-rights, anti-religion and anti- any political, social or trade union groups. Whatever its shortcomings, *Rambo* will remain a special legacy of Sylvester Stallone for the Burmese people, for as long as they continue to fight for freedom.

*The author is a Burmese student living in England.*

*Rambo, certificate 18, was released in the UK on 22 February 2008.*