



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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**Police roundup pushes homeless people out of Pyay City,
Bago Division, August 2012**

This report is based on information¹ submitted to KHRG in September 2012 by a community member from Yangon Region trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It describes events occurring in Pyay City, Bago Division, on August 3rd 2012 when City Development Committee staff and policemen carried out a nighttime city-sweep to remove homeless families. The authorities used a public rubbish truck to forcibly detain the families and then to transport them to Okshittpin Forest, which is halfway between Pyay City and the border with Rakhine State. The families were abandoned in the forest during a monsoon rain, and were threatened not to return to Pyay. Both children and adults were threatened with prison if they returned. However, the families did return to Pyay, after they encountered several problems along the way, including being without food to eat for two days, not having baby formula for infants, inadequate shelter under which to sleep, and most of the younger children became sick. Once they returned to Pyay City, the families were assisted with medicine. Pocket money and education was provided to the children by a local organization.

On the evening of August 3rd 2012, in Pyay City, Bago Division, City Development staff and local policemen used a rubbish truck to arrest an estimated 30 homeless people and abandoned them in the forest, which is 15 miles outside the city. During the sweep, the police took note of people's names, ages, and collected photos of the families before placing them on the rubbish truck. According to one 12-year-old boy, named Maung H--, the authorities arrested the people from several parts of the city, instead of sweeping one area.

"My mother, my elder sister and my nephew were included [arrested] first. My elder brother was and my sister were cycling a trishaw [for hire]. They told me [about the

¹ This bulletin is supported by information collected by a community member who was trained by KHRG to document human rights issues. The events in this news bulletin occurred within Bago Region, outside of KHRG's normal research areas. While KHRG normally operates in Nyaunglebin District (eastern Bago Region), the incidents documented in this news bulletin took place in Pyay City, Okshittpin and Pa Daung, which are all located in the western part of Bago, near the border with southern Rakhine State. In September 2012, that community member submitted nine other interviews, 540 photographs and ten video clips relating to the victims arrested in Pyay City on August 3rd 2012; two of these interviews will soon be published on KHRG's website.

events]. *I went and told Maung J---'s mother that my mother and my sister were arrested. When his mother and I were going to the western part of the [unclear], through the lane beside Shwe Min Tha Mee shop, which is in front of the railway station, many motorbikes and a car came out. The car was blue. They said, "Don't run away. Sit still." They put our group into there [rubbish truck] as well. They also arrested a new group in Myo Thit."*

Among the estimated² 30 people, 15 were children. Many of those who boarded the trucks did so because of threats that they would be beaten if they did not. Some of the arrested people did attempt to resist, however they were forcibly loaded on the truck by the authorities involved. One of the arrested children, an 11-year-old boy named Maung P---, described being grabbed by the neck. Some mothers pleaded to stay off the truck because they lacked formula to feed their babies, but the police refused to allow them to stay. One unidentified mother said, "*We told them that we will go and buy the milk powder but they didn't allow us to go*". Ma M---, a 12-year-old girl, told the community member, "*They didn't beat us that much, but they woke up the babies' mothers by kicking them forcibly.*"

In addition to threats of violence, both children and adults were told that they would be sent to prison if they returned to the city. In order to prevent their return, the police ordered the families to lower their heads and to not look around while they were driven to Okshittpin Forest. Three of the children reported to the community member that the authorities told them to continue further along the road towards Rakhine State, where they would be provided ID cards and land on which to live.

² Because the sweep occurred at various locations in Pyay City, and at various times during the night, those arrested differed in reported estimates. This number represents the most commonly stated estimate that was reported.

Later that same night, the families were abandoned in the Okshittpin Forest during a monsoon rain. There were no settlements in the forest for the families to sleep in, nor was there food or people from whom to get help. On their return, the families slept in ditches, in graveyards, and in rest huts, because most of them did not have money to pay a car fee. Some



These undated photos were taken by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor human rights. The photo on the left is of Maung P--- and the photo on the right is of Ma M---, both of whom were interviewed by the community member trained by KHRG about the police and the development committee staff pushing homeless people out of Pyay City. These two children were included among the victims arrested and abandoned in the Okshittpin Forest on August 3rd 2012. [Photos: KHRG]

begged for food and money along the way. Most had arrived on foot, but some were able to hire cars along the way. It took everyone between two to six days to return to Pyay City, and one unidentified victim told the community member that the children and infants became very sick on the return journey. All victims returned to the city because they had no alternative livelihoods elsewhere.

Once in Pyay, they could access assistance from a Civil Society Organization (CSO).³ This CSO gave them food, money for the sick children and opened a school for the children. Maung P--- also told the community member, "*Only the adults were in good health [after returning]; the babies were not in good health. Therefore, this place [the organization] gave 1,000 [kyat] (US\$1.14)⁴ per child. They gave it because the children were sick.*" As of September 2012, when the reports were submitted, some of the children were able to continue with this assistance.

³ The name of this CBO was censored for security.

⁴ As of April 9th 2013, all conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 879 kyat to the US \$1.



The undated photos above were taken by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor human rights. They show homeless children from Pyay City who have been sheltered at a monastery. These children are able to access humanitarian aid from a local CSO, such as food and healthcare for the babies. Some of the children in the photos were victims in the August 3rd police arrests. [Photos: KHRG]