EVIDENCE OF UNLAWFUL KILLING AND TORTURE OF ETHNIC MINORITIES IN BURMA

SAYS AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International said today (Wednesday, 11 May 1988) it has evidence of serious human rights violations in Burma by army units engaged in counter-insurgency operations.

The victims are mainly members of Burma's ethnic minorities, civilian villagers living in remote and mountainous states where the Burmese army has been fighting various armed opposition groups.

In a new report Amnesty International includes testimonies describing nearly 200 cases of apparent unlawful killing, torture and ill-treatment by government forces. The evidence comes from some of the thousands of Karen, Mon, and Kachin ethnic minority people who have fled across Burma's borders in search of safety.

The testimonies detail 60 cases of what the worldwide human rights organization believes to be "extra-judicial executions" -- unlawful and deliberate killings carried out by governments or with their acquiescence.

Amnesty International says in the 40 years since Burma gained independence, every administration has been challenged to some extent by ethnic armed insurgencies during which government forces have faced violent attacks. But it stresses that none of the killings or torture by government forces described in its new report on the country took place in the context of actual combat.

The 71-page report says that in an effort to deny the insurgents any...
possible support, the army has imposed harsh restrictions on the villagers of this isolated country. These include controlling people's movement, residence, and wealth, and regrouping villages into "strategic hamlets" (fenced settlements) under strict curfew.

Many villagers who have been seized to work as porters or guides for the army have died. Captured villagers have been force-marched until they fall dead from sickness or exhaustion or are murdered for not working hard enough. Some are blown up in minefields through which they have been forced to lead troops.

One former porter described the murder of a Karen porter, aged 18, who became too weak to carry his load. "He fell down and refused to stand up again. He could not stand up by himself; he was too exhausted. The soldier got his knife out...and stabbed him in the back [several times]...the column kept proceeding".

Many villagers -- such as rice farmers who must tend crops in often far-off fields -- depend on free movement for their livelihood. Consequently they are forced to risk their lives in order to survive, Amnesty International says.

Maung Shwe Taung, killed in May 1987, is one example cited. He was shot by troops when discovered at night in fields declared off-limits, close to where he had stored a quantity of rice in excess of the amount permitted.

Being discovered in off-limit areas can also lead to torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading punishment. A 22-year-old woman and her 11-year-old niece were detained by soldiers on the way from their fields to the village. They were held overnight and both were raped several times.

Since human rights investigators are not allowed to enter Burma, Amnesty International has based its report on interviews carried out in seven different places outside the country -- allowing for cross-checking testimony given by different sources.
Amnesty International says the accounts of human rights violations given are so numerous and similar that in its view they show a consistent pattern of gross violations of human rights -- in defiance of Burmese and international law.

The organization urges the Burmese Government to launch a full-scale inquiry into the reports of killing and torture and to allow qualified human rights investigators full access to the areas where abuses are widespread.

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