

NLD Statement 119/2000:

National League for Democracy
No: (97/B), West Shwegonedine Road
Bahan Township, Rangoon

Statement 119 (8/00) (translation)

1. The authorities concerned wanted to complete the construction of the 108 feet high pagoda on Shaw-bin hillock, (Magyi-bin village tract, Wuntho township, Sagaing division) by June 2000. Forced labor for this construction was demanded from the administrative regions of Nankhan, Gyo-taung, Kin, Taung-gyan, Nauk-chan, A-sshasichan, and Maing-thone-chaung-phyia village group.

2. The labor force was inadequate for the task. People were required to dig the land, carry bricks, sand and stones. They had to cut down trees, bamboo and transport them to be used as fuel for baking the bricks. These villagers had to take their own supplies of food to last them a week at a time. Those who had to travel from far away areas experienced great hardship. No medical services was given to those who fell ill. Penalty for failing to give forced labour was Kyats 1400/- and 2 pyis of rice. Inability to cut and supply wood resulted in a separate fine of kyats 1400/- per stack. Attendance to matters relating to death and other personal affairs had to be postponed till after completion of this work. People are very unhappy and disgruntled and those living in the villages around the area are terribly afraid and worried.

3. The adjoining townships of Katha, Indaw, Ban-mauk, Hte-jiane, and Pin-le-boo have had to contribute seven hundred and fifty thousand bricks each and transport them to the base of the pagoda site. Motor vehicle associations too have had to contribute at the rate of Kyats 14500/- per heavy vehicle and Kyats3000/ per lighter vehicle. In some townships more was demanded.

This forced labor is referred to not as "voluntary labor" (the usual expression used by the authorities) but as meritorious giving of "dhana" function. The fact remains that people are forced to give their labor. The people have no choice and the work brings no joy. This certainly is not what Buddha taught and we ask that such forced labor as related above be immediately halted.

Central Executive Committee
National League for Democracy

Rangoon
2 August 2000.