CHAPTER 19
Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation
19.1 Introduction

Despite intense international focus on the human rights situation in Burma in 2008, forced displacement, as a result of conflict and human rights violations, was ongoing in the country. Throughout 2008, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) military regime remained the main perpetrator in the majority of violations against civilians, particularly those against ethnic minority groups. Further, the SPDC remained unwilling to fulfil their obligations in relation to internally displaced persons (IDPs), flatly rejecting the assertion of the presence of a large number of IDPs in Burma. As a result, during 2008, the junta’s restrictions on humanitarian access continued to obstruct aid workers in Burma, particularly in conflict-affected areas.

There are great discrepancies in the nationwide figures of Burma’s internally displaced person (IDP) population. This is partly due to the difficulty in accurately cataloguing and recording IDP numbers and is further exacerbated by the nature of displacement throughout Burma, which tends to be cyclical; IDPs are continually being displaced, relocated, or forced to flee, until they settle in a relocation site, ceasefire area, or in hiding, only to be forced again to move due to conflict, land confiscation, or most often, by human rights abuses. Hence, the concept of an IDP ‘population’ is a changing one, as it continually increases and decreases dependant upon a number of factors. It is widely believed that there are at least one million IDPs inside Burma. However, some estimates of IDP populations alone have also reached as high as three million people.

The most reliable estimates for 2008 have suggested a 10 percent reduction in the IDP population in eastern Burma as compared to 2007, which has been attributed to a decrease of over 70,000 IDPs living in ceasefire areas. However estimates for IDPs in hiding sites and relocation sites increased during 2008, reflecting the junta’s expanded influence in eastern Burma and the pressure on ceasefire groups to surrender their arms and territory. The total number of displaced persons in eastern Burma in 2008 was estimated to be over 500,000, with at least 451,000 people recorded as being displaced in rural areas alone. Approximately 224,000 of these people lived in temporary settlements of “ceasefire areas” administrated by ethnic nationality ceasefire groups, while 101,000 civilians are estimated to be hiding from the junta in areas most affected by military conflict and approximately 127,000 villagers have followed junta eviction orders and moved into designated relocation sites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States and Divisions</th>
<th>IDPs in Hiding</th>
<th>Relocation Sites</th>
<th>Ceasefire Areas</th>
<th>Total IDPs</th>
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<td>Tenasserim Division</td>
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<td>55,700</td>
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<td><strong>127,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>224,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>451,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TBBC estimates of internally displaced persons living in eastern Burma during 2008.

Reliable figures on IDP populations in certain parts of the country are increasingly difficult to obtain. As may be seen elsewhere throughout this report, human rights abuses in some states and divisions are more widely documented than they are in others. This situation is further reflected in this current chapter, where limited information on IDPs has been made available, particularly in Burma’s central divisions and in urban areas. Please note,
however, that the disparity in the availability of information does not necessarily indicate that there are fewer IDPs or lower levels of displacement in those areas which have furnished less information.

During 2008, an estimated 66,000 people in Burma were forced to flee from their homes as a result of, or in order to avoid, the effects of armed conflict and human rights abuses. The Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) which was responsible for providing this figure, has maintained that this represents a slight decrease in the rate of displacement over the last few years and also a reduction in military attacks on civilian villages. The highest frequency of displacement during 2008 was reported to be among villagers already living in hiding from military patrols in Papun District of northern Karen State. Meanwhile, communities in neighbouring Pegu Division who had previously been living in hiding were increasingly being consolidated into SPDC-garrisoned forced relocation sites, as were villagers in Laikha, Nansang and Kunhing Townships of Shan State.  

According to analysis provided by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (iDMC), the situation is at its worst in Karen State where more than 40,000 civilians have been forced from their homes since late 2005 by the military’s ongoing offensive against unarmed civilian villages and insurgent groups. The offensive has been characterised by military attacks on undefended rural civilian villages, the forcible relocation of their inhabitants to SPDC-controlled relocation sites, and the extension of heavy-handed military authority over civilian populations. Forced displacement was also reported to have occurred in areas where ceasefire agreements had been negotiated between the junta and ethnic Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs). Meanwhile, communities across the country continued to have their land confiscated by the junta. Amnesty International’s (AI) Annual Report on Burma for 2008 claimed that forced displacement enacted by the military continued in all seven of Burma’s ethnic states, despite the existence of ceasefire agreements with the armies of all but three of the major ethnic groups.

Ethnic Karen children living in hiding in the forest in northern Karen State during 2008. These children are among the estimated 104,900 IDPs living in Karen State alone. [Photo: © FBR]
19.2 International Norms and Conventions

The United Nations Guiding Principles on International Displacement (henceforth referred to as “the Guiding Principles”), which represent the international framework for the protection of and assistance to IDPs, defines an internally displaced person (IDP) under Article 2 as:

“[P]ersons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border”.

According to the Handbook for Applying the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the distinctive feature on internal displacement is “coerced or involuntary movement that takes place within national borders,” with precursors to flight including “armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, and natural or human-made disasters.”

The rights of IDPs have been most explicitly stated in the Guiding Principles, and though not a legally binding document, the Guiding Principles have elucidated the rights of IDPs from existing international humanitarian and human rights law. According to Principle 5, States’ authorities “shall respect and ensure respect for their obligations under international law, including human rights and humanitarian law, in all circumstances so as to prevent and avoid conditions that might lead to displacement of persons.” Furthermore, when displacement does occur, Principle 3 dictates that States “have the primary duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons within their jurisdiction.” In short, it is the responsibility of the State to ensure that all efforts are made to prevent the forced displacement of persons and to provide adequate provisions for their protection when such displacement does occur.

The Guiding Principles are founded on the concept of sovereignty as entailing responsibility. They not only affirm that national authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to provide assistance and protection to IDPs within their jurisdiction, but also grant IDPs the right to request and receive protection and assistance from national authorities. These Principles also underline the right of international humanitarian organizations to provide support for IDPs and emphasise that a government should not arbitrarily withhold consent to such aid, especially in a situation where it is unable or unwilling to provide the assistance needed.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was the first instrument to establish international norms concerning the prohibition of forced relocation and the protections afforded to internally displaced persons. Article 12 of the UDHR protects against arbitrary interference or attacks on the home. Article 25(1) also protects the right to housing. These protections were restated in the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Article 12(1) of the ICCPR states that, “Everyone lawfully within the territory of a State shall, within that territory, have the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence.” Meanwhile, Article 17(1) asserts “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation.” Similarly, Article 11(1) of the ICESCR recognizes “the right of everyone to adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.”
At the time of publication, and despite the large number of international instruments in place to protect individuals from displacement and to provide for protection should displacement occur, Burma has only signed two such international conventions, specifically, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). These two conventions require Burma to take appropriate measures to ensure that women and children have unhindered access to adequate housing under Articles 14(2)(h) and 27(3) respectively.

Furthermore, Article 17 of the Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions (1977) Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Additional Protocol II), clearly states that:

“The displacement of the civilian population shall not be ordered for reasons related to the conflict unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand. Should such displacements have to be carried out, all possible measures shall be taken in order that the civilian population may be received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition.”

Though Burma has neither ratified or acceded to the Additional Protocol II, the principles contained therein are now considered *jus cogens* and as such are regarded as customary international law, thus making the laws outlined therein binding on all States regardless of whether they have ratified the document or not.

Even with the weight of international conventions, laws and norms favouring a prohibition against forced relocations and the imperatives to provide for the safety and security of IDPs, internal displacement and forced relocation continued to be widespread throughout Burma during 2008.

Though many cyclone victims were not provided with any aid whatsoever, many others took refuge in monasteries and aid camps. Some survivors, such as those shown in this photograph in Labutta Township, Irrawaddy Division in May 2008, were provided with privately donated tents after their homes had been destroyed by the storm. [Photo: © Moe Aung Tin/Irrawaddy]
19.3 Causes of Displacement in Burma

The definition of an IDP in the Guiding Principles suggests three district categories of displacement: displacement caused by armed conflict, displacement induced by State and private development, and displacement due to human rights abuses. These distinctions were explored in depth in a Refugee Studies Centre Working Paper, produced in February 2007, entitled *Burma: the Changing Nature of Displacement Crises*. The author of that report also describes three similar categories: armed-conflict-induced displacement, State/society induced displacement, and livelihood/vulnerability-induced displacement. Displacement often results not only from overt violence and abuse that has already taken place but also due to the avoidance of threats yet to occur.

Conflict-Induced Displacement

Armed conflict has been a consistent theme of the Burmese landscape since independence in 1948. Though approximately two dozen ceasefires were struck between the regime and insurgency groups from 1989 to 1995, a number significant ethnic organizations still remained in conflict with the junta during 2008. In areas where such groups were still operational, SPDC army units continued to mount military assaults on civilian villages, all in the name of counter-insurgency. Thus, in the ethnic states of eastern Burma, armed conflict continued to be a considerable contributor to the displacement crises throughout 2008.

The term conflict-induced displacement can therefore be misleading, in that one automatically forms a mental image of conflict in a traditional sense and assumes that civilians with no active role in the fighting are being displaced when the conflict waged between two opposing parties flows over into their homes. However, this is generally not the case in Burma where the conflict is a low intensity war of attrition primarily targeting civilians, where displacement of civilian villagers is the intended outcome of the conflict rather than a side effect of it. The vast majority of skirmishes between the junta and armed resistance groups occur when the latter attempts to protect civilian villagers from attacks by SPDC army units to give the villagers the chance to flee, although the frequency of such instances pales in comparison to deliberate attacks on unarmed civilian villages. In these cases, the villagers are not fleeing fighting between the SPDC and the resistance group, but rather it is that fighting which is slowing the advance of the SPDC army unit and giving the villagers the opportunity to get away.

In most cases, the result of armed attacks on civilian villages is that villagers are forced to relocate, either to take refuge in the surrounding forest or other villages, move to an SPDC-controlled relocation site, or flee to neighbouring countries as refugees. They often continue to be endangered by armed conflict even after they flee.

During 2008, conflict-induced displacement was most concentrated in the areas of northern Karen State, where 491 separate armed clashes were reported to have taken place between SPDC army units and soldiers of the opposition Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) in the first six months of the year alone. The widespread militarization of the area reportedly led to the displacement of an estimated 27,000 villagers from the four affected townships during 2008 alone, primarily related to the destruction of crops and food supplies, the forced relocation of entire villages and attempts to evade SPDC army patrols which hunt them.
Development-Induced Displacement

Also leading to the forcible displacement of communities in Burma during 2008 were numerous State-sponsored and private development projects including, but not limited to, the construction of mining concessions and hydroelectric dams. There have been repeated reports of the military using severely heavy-handed tactics to secure control over the area where such sites are located, including the forced relocation of entire villages. Small-scale infrastructure and amenity development, such as the establishment of military bases and the construction of roads were linked to forced labour, extortion, and land confiscation. Meanwhile, larger projects such as dam construction, mining and the establishment of hydroelectric power plants also lead to land confiscation, forced labour, and environmental degradation as well as posing the possibility of further destruction and flooding of thousands of homes. Moreover, all such sites are typically flooded with large numbers of SPDC army soldiers to forcibly relocate civilian populations away from the project and to protect it from possible sabotage by opposition groups. The sharp increase in militarization of the area invariably brings with it a commensurate increase in human rights violations (for more information, see the following section on “Human Rights-Induced Displacement”).

According to some sources, Burma has the fastest growing oil and gas industry in Southeast Asia. During 2008, the Yadana natural gas project in eastern Burma, the junta’s largest source of revenue, continued to destabilise the population through the imposition of forced labour, land confiscation, extortion and overt violence. Similar abuses along the adjacent Kanbauk-Myaing Kalay gas pipeline in Mon State also reportedly contributed to displacement during 2008.

On 18 June 2008, the Kayan Women’s Union (KWU) released a report entitled *Drowning the Green Ghosts of Kayanland*, in which they asserted that one of the hydroelectric dams being constructed by the junta in the Pyinmana mountain range will flood 12 civilian Kayan villages and over 5,000 acres of fertile farmland in southern Shan State, and displace an estimated 3,500 people. According to the report, the Upper Paunglaung Dam is being constructed to generate more electricity for Naypyidaw. Construction, which commenced in 2004 and is reportedly funded by a number of Chinese companies, is expected to be completed in December 2009. By early 2008, a number of the villages located in the valley had already begun moving out of their homes and relocating to other areas of Shan and Karenni States. None of those affected were consulted prior to the commencement of the project and nor have they been offered any form of compensation for the loss of their homes and their livelihoods.

According to reports by the Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF), land confiscation is one of the leading causes of displacement in Shan State. Land has been confiscated from local villagers without any compensation or rehabilitation since the military took control of the country in the 1960s, however, the SHRF has reported that the practice has increased over the past decade. In an apparent attempt to militarize all rural areas of Shan State, the junta has increased the number of battalions stationed throughout the state and have confiscated large tracts of land without compensation to accommodate these new battalions. Originally, land was confiscated upon which to build military bases, however, according to the SHRF, more recently the junta has confiscated land to make way for their own money-making ventures, including agriculture, brick baking, and charcoal making, among other schemes. Often such ventures involve the forced labour of the local population, including those who the land was originally confiscated from. Land has also been confiscated for the building of State infrastructure such as roads and dams.

It was also reported that large quantities of land had been confiscated from local communities in southern Shan State in 2008 for a new coal mining project. Other similar mining projects in Karenni State have reportedly been “protected” by the SPDC by the comprehensive deployment of antipersonnel landmines, which has also lead to the displacement of nearby villages and the abandonment of their homes, fields and livelihoods for fear of stepping on one of the mines.
Human Rights-Induced Displacement

In addition to the more traditional conflict-induced and development-induced displacement discussed above, internal displacement in Burma is also caused by a combination of coercive and economic factors which lead to the impoverishment and forced migration of local populations. Such practices and policies employed by the SPDC and its allied ceasefire armies include land confiscation, the use of forced labour, arbitrary taxation and extortion, theft and looting, enforced agricultural quotas and procurement policies and restrictions on the freedom of movement.25 As such, the systematic and widespread violation of human rights is one of the leading causes of displacement in Burma today. While many reports published throughout 2008 continued to refer to “civilians fleeing fighting”, the reality remains that conflict in Burma is typically of a low intensity and what civilians flee from more often than not are the human rights abuses that invariably accompany militarization and not overt fighting as is often implied. This is especially prevalent in areas of ethnic armed conflict. In such contexts, it is misleading to use the term “fighting”, as this implies that the villagers are fleeing from counter-insurgency measures used by SPDC army units against armed resistance groups and that the conflict has spilled over unintentionally into civilian villages where the villagers are easily labelled as “collateral damage”.26 Such assumptions could not be any further from the truth. For the most part, the only real “fighting” that ever takes place is when SPDC army columns attack undefended civilian villages and opposition forces attempt to intervene to give the villagers a chance to escape. In all such attacks, the villagers cannot be considered “collateral damage”, but rather the intended targets of them. Actual cases of SPDC army forces seeking out and engaging the resistance are rare.27

IDPs hiding in the forest and attempting to evade all contact with the military are not necessarily ordered or physically compelled to move or relocate. However, due to arbitrary arrest, forced relocation, extortion, forced labour, torture, to rape and extrajudicial execution, villagers are effectively left with little choice but to leave as the conditions forced upon them make it exceedingly difficult to survive. This type of movement has been referred to by some commentators as “distress migration” or “migration for survival”.28

Once interned in an SPDC-controlled relocation site, IDPs are kept on the brink of impoverishment and starvation through an extensive system of extortion and demands for food, labour and other goods. Also, the villagers’ freedoms of movement are strictly curtailed, and in some cases stripped totally. This is done apparently to impoverish the villagers to such a point that they cannot provide material support to resistance forces even if they should want to (which is not always the case). Ultimately, when the demands become too great and food too scarce, many villagers flee from relocation sites to live as IDPs deep in the forest where they hope to evade roving SPDC army patrols.29

Those who have fled from forced relocation sites or simply refused to move to one in the first place and live beyond SPDC-control as IDPs do not have to perform forced labour or pay arbitrary taxes and extortion. However, life in the forest brings with it a while new series of challenges and dangers, and IDPs living in hiding must be ever vigilant and prepared to flee ahead of any advancing SPDC army units. If seen by SPDC army patrols, IDPs are often fired upon without warning or provocation. By refusing to comply with SPDC demands and living beyond their control, IDPs in conflict areas are thus considered as enemies of the State, who must be either rounded up and relocated to state-controlled relocation sites, or simply shot on sight. SPDC army patrols also systematically destroy any hidden settlements in the forests where IDPs have been living as well as any food supplies or crops that they discover in an attempt to starve them out of the hills.30
19.4 Destinations of the Displaced and Forcibly Relocated

Forced Relocation Sites

For the past six decades, the central military regime has been confronted by armed opposition along Burma's eastern border with Thailand. SPDC forces continue to target unarmed civilian villagers using a scorched earth campaign known as the Four Cuts Policy. This policy is said to sever all links between resistance groups and their supposed civilian support base by blocking their access to food, funds, recruits and intelligence. Central to this Policy is the SPDC’s forced relocation campaign. In areas experiencing armed conflict, territory is typically divided into three coloured zones to describe the area’s status: ‘black’ areas that are controlled by resistance forces; contested ‘brown’ areas; and ‘white’ areas where all traces of armed resistance have been eliminated. The SPDC’s desire is to transform all ‘black’ rebel-held areas into ‘brown’ contested areas through the process of military expansionism, and then to transfer these areas into ‘white’ SPDC-controlled areas, devoid of all forms of resistance or dissent. Under the Four Cuts Policy, the military forces villagers living in ‘black’ or ‘brown’ zones to move to SPDC-garrisoned forced relocation sites in areas where the military is able to exert a larger degree of control, often with little or no warning. In order to escape the soldiers, many villagers refuse these relocation orders and go into hiding by fleeing deeper into the forest. These relocation sites are often positioned along road corridors, adjacent to existing SPDC army camps so that the soldiers can more easily regiment the freedoms of the villagers interned there, monitor their movements and exploit them as forced labour to porter military supplies along those same roadways. Villages are usually only given a week, though in many cases considerably less time, to dismantle their homes, gather all of their belongings and move all that they can to the relocation site. Villagers who remain behind after the appointed time has elapsed can be shot on sight. Meanwhile, many other villagers are ordered to leave all of their possessions behind and are ensured that they will be permitted to return to collect them later. However, such promises almost invariably prove to be worth less than the paper that they are written on, and once interned at the relocation site with little more than they could carry on their backs, the villagers are refused permission to return to collect the rest of their belongings. Although, even if they were granted such permission they would soon discover that the soldiers had already plundered the village, stolen everything of value, eaten their fill of the food, and destroyed whatever they were unable to cart off. Examples of this happening are far from rare in Burma.

Upon arriving at the relocation site, villagers are characteristically not provided with any supplies by the SPDC. They are usually only given a small plot of land on which they must construct their home. Villagers must also provide their own building materials and carry out all of the labour themselves. To ensure that the villagers do not attempt to return to their homes in secret, the soldiers often plant landmines in the villages that have had their residents relocated, or simply burn the whole site to the ground.

The majority of SPDC-designated and controlled forced relocation sites are overcrowded, have no existing sanitation facilities, are typically located “on barren land” that is not suitable for agriculture, and often have inadequate access to fresh drinking water. Furthermore, new arrivals to the site have a particularly difficult time in acquiring enough food to feed their families, as they are not only denied the right to return to their village or fields, but as a result of the gross overcrowding, almost all of the available arable land is already under cultivation. As such, SPDC-controlled relocation sites fail miserably to meet the minimum requirements for villagers to establish and sustain a livelihood.
Forcibly relocated villagers are rarely granted permission to leave to tend to crops, travel to markets in neighbouring villages or visit friends and relatives once interned in a forced relocation site. Furthermore, in many relocation sites, the residents are forced to erect tall bamboo containment fences around the entire site, leaving only one or two entrances allowing access or departure. These gates are guarded by SPDC army soldiers who record the names of everyone entering or exiting the site. The construction of these fences only serves to further curtail the movement of those interned within the relocation site. At most relocation sites, the only way that a villager is allowed to travel outside the fences is when he/she is in possession of an SPDC-issued travel permit; obtained only after payment of a fee. While some travel passes authorize travel of up to one week, many only allow villagers to be away from the relocation site during the hours of daylight, typically between 6:00 am and 6:00 pm. However, possession of a valid travel permit does not necessarily mean safe passage. For example, Rohingya villagers in Buthidaung Township of Arakan State are regularly captured by SPDC authorities who then destroy their travel passes and accuse them of travelling without proper documentation purely to harass and extort money from them. Meanwhile, in areas of armed conflict, villagers found travelling outside the relocation site are often accused of having been in contact with resistance forces and are frequently fired upon on sight without checking to see if they have proper documentation or not. In such areas, the SPDC and its agents typically employ a policy of “shoot first, ask questions later”.

The increased proximity of villagers to SPDC army soldiers greatly increases the likelihood that they will be the subject of a variety of human rights abuses. Villagers interned in SPDC-controlled relocation sites are often called upon to provide forced labour for the military, constructing and maintaining roads and military camps (of both the SPDC and its allied ceasefire armies), portering supplies along those roads to outlying camps, serving as guides and human minesweepers in military operations, and as servants, messengers and errand runners for the soldiers. (For more information, see Chapter 7: Forced Labour and Forced Conscription). Relocated villagers also face numerous other demands for money, food, building materials and other goods. (For more information, see Chapter 8: Deprivation of Livelihood). In addition, villagers are also beaten and tortured by the soldiers when the endless stream of demands is not met. (For more information, see Chapter 2: Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment).

While the total known population of relocation sites in eastern Burma decreased by approximately 9,000 people between 2006 and 2007, these figures rose again by 17,000 to 126,000 during 2008. Unfortunately, very little information exists on the population of relocation sites in other parts of the country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States and Divisions</th>
<th>IDPs in Forced Relocation Sites</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007</td>
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<td>Karen State</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>109,000</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in the table above, in those areas for which reliable figures exist (in eastern Burma), by far the greatest concentration of IDPs living in forced relocation sites is in Tenasserim Division where over 55,000 people, or approximately 45 percent of the total, are estimated to be residing.\(^\text{38}\) During 2008, and for the second year in a row, population estimates for relocation sites in Eastern Pegu Division (also known as Nyaunglebin Division under the Karen system of demarcation; for more information, see “Karen State Disputed Areas of Demarcation” in the Appendices) have doubled.\(^\text{39}\) The ongoing military offensive waged against civilian villages in northern Karen State is almost certainly the cause of this.

![Image: Karen villagers from T’Aye Kee and Mwee Loh villages in Toungoo District of northern Karen State can be seen here as they flee from advancing SPDC army troops, carrying their children and whatever possessions they can on their backs. [Photo: © KHRG]](image)

**IDP Hiding Sites**

Many villagers in ethnic minority areas choose to live in hiding from the junta and its allied ceasefire armies in order to avoid the abuse they have suffered at the hands of these groups. Many villagers constantly flee in the face of SPDC army patrols, knowing only too well how they will be treated if caught. According to the TBBC, an estimated 101,000 persons were living in hiding in the remote mountains and forests throughout eastern Burma during 2008. As with the estimates for internally displaced persons living in relocation sites (discussed above), the estimates for people in hiding sites had also increased over the past year, however only slightly. (See the table reproduced below).\(^\text{40}\) According to the TBBC figures, just under half of all IDPs living in hiding in eastern Burma were in Karen State. This number then leaps to approximately 70 percent, or more than 70,000 people, when you include those IDPs hiding in Eastern Pegu Division, which under the Karen system of demarcation represents Nyaunglebin District of Karen State.\(^\text{41}\)

A significant number of IDPs typically build their hiding sites only a short distance away from their former villages and fields so that they only need travel a short distance to harvest their crops and salvage what they can from what remains of their former homes. The flip side of this is that it increases the risk of being detected by roving SPDC army patrols. Meanwhile, others will abandon their fields for small plantations and cash crops hidden in the forest where it is easier to remain hidden. There have been countless cases of SPDC army soldiers firing upon IDPs as they attempted to harvest their fields; where they are more vulnerable and easier to pick off in the open fields. IDPs hiding in the forest must always be alert of the movements of SPDC army soldiers who hunt them and be prepared to flee whenever a patrol draws near to
where they are hiding. Whenever an IDP hiding site is discovered, it is typically bombarded with mortar fire before it is stormed by the soldiers, then anything of value is either eaten, stolen or destroyed, all of the shelters are razed to the ground, and the entire site and the paths which approach it are sewn with antipersonnel landmines. (For more information, see Chapter 4: Landmines and Other Explosive Devices).

During 2008, there were numerous reports of targeted military assaults on unarmed civilian settlements, however, it was reported that the frequency of such attacks had decreased from previous years. In many areas, the junta has consolidated its reach by building a network of new roads and establishing a series of permanent military bases in the area from which its soldiers could mount regular patrols through the surrounding hills to depopulate the area by either forcibly relocating local communities or enacting a shoot-on-sight policy against those who refused to comply.

While information for the number of IDPs living in hiding for eastern Burma is readily available, there unfortunately is very limited information available for many other parts of the country.

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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TBBC estimates of internally displaced persons living in hiding sites in the forests in eastern Burma during 2007 and 2008.

Karen IDPs on the run in late 2008. Flight is a common part of life for displaced communities living in hiding in the forests of eastern Burma. Fear is clearly visible on their faces as they await the all clear from the KNLA unit escorting them across a motor road in northern Karen State. [Photo: © FBR]
Ceasefire Areas

According to TBBC figures, the majority of IDPs in eastern Burma have moved into ethnic administered “ceasefire areas”. The ceasefire groups include former allies of the Communist Party of Burma, militias who split from the main political party representing their ethnic group, and former members of the armed opposition’s National Democratic Front (NDF). Among the ceasefire groups, the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) and the Karenni Nationalities People’s Liberation Front (KNPLF) have all been complicit in forced relocations and the suppression of human rights. (For more information, see “Section 18.6: Ceasefire Status of Various Armed Ethnic Groups” in Chapter 18: Ethnic Minority Rights).

While the estimates concerning the number of IDPs living in relocation sites during 2008 increased, the numbers of people in areas controlled by ethnic ceasefire armies decreased during 2008. Of the 451,000 estimated persons displaced in eastern Burma in 2008, just under half, i.e. about 224,000 were reported to be located in ceasefire areas. This represents a decrease in approximately 69,000 for the same area over the previous year. According to the TBBC, these findings reflect the junta’s expanded influence throughout eastern Burma and the pressure that it has been placing on ceasefire groups to surrender their arms and territory. In effect, the TBBC says that there has been a “leakage” of IDPs out of ceasefire areas and into contested “mixed administration areas” which they claim are beyond the reach of their survey.

While in many cases, ceasefire areas may provide a temporary respite from human rights violations inflicted by the SPDC, the majority of ethnic ceasefire groups are unable to adequately provide for IDPs who have taken refuge in areas under their administration, while others are just as guilty as the SPDC for the perpetration of human rights violations against local communities. For example, over 40,000 IDPs are estimated to be residing in the Mon ceasefire areas administered primarily by the New Mon State Party (NMSP), where there is limited access to agricultural land, draconian SPDC restrictions on travel and the inability of ethnic nationality authorises to support resettlement or compensate for lost livelihood assets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States and Divisions</th>
<th>IDPs in Ceasefire Areas</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karen State</td>
<td>55,600</td>
<td>44,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karenni State</td>
<td>66,200</td>
<td>39,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon State</td>
<td>41,600</td>
<td>42,100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Pegu Division</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Shan State</td>
<td>126,000</td>
<td>92,400</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenasserim Division</td>
<td>5,600</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>295,000</td>
<td>224,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TBBC estimates of internally displaced persons living in “ceasefire areas” in eastern Burma during 2007 and 2008.
19.5 Humanitarian Assistance

As discussed above, the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement expressly state that the SPDC is under an obligation to protect and provide aid to those who have been internally displaced. Principle 3(1) states that “National authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons within their jurisdiction.” The adequacy of humanitarian assistance can be measured by its effectiveness to address the immediate difficulties faced by IDPs while supporting the longer recovery processes of those effected and promoting positive change in the attitudes and structures that neglect human rights and contribute to such harm. Such principles, however, are inconsistent with the policies employed by the SPDC towards IDPs. The SPDC fails to provide any form of humanitarian assistance to IDPs, primarily because their displacement is the desired result of the conflict, not a consequence of it, coupled with their standard denial of the existence of the problem.

In 2008, it was reported that the SPDC moved to further restrict the activities of most humanitarian agencies in the country. Such actions would suggest that the regime does not want the international community to bear witness to the atrocities they are responsible for. As a result of such restrictions, those communities which are in the greatest need of assistance are also those which are off limits to international aid organizations. The only way that aid is able to reach these communities is by circumventing official channels and sending aid into the country cross border from neighbouring countries. The SPDC argues that this violates their sovereignty and labels all such groups illegal. A number of community based organizations (CBOs) operate in Burma’s conflict zones, particularly in eastern Burma, to bring aid to internally displaced communities at great risk to themselves. There have been a number of cases in the past in which some of these relief teams have come under fire from SPDC army soldiers. As in previous years, limited amounts of cross border aid were sent into Burma from Bangladesh, India and Thailand and a very limited amount from China. Many cross border aid networks are closely associated with armed resistance groups, on which they rely for security and logistical arrangements. While some organizations are affiliated with resistance groups, many of them remain independent.

Despite restrictions on aid delivery and the barriers to it formed by SPDC policy, some international humanitarian agencies have been able to provide some protection for IDPs. For example, it has been reported that in parts of Arakan State where there are international aid agencies functioning, there has been a reduction in human rights violations committed against IDPs.

A Free Burma Rangers (FBR) relief team carrying supplies, medicines, tarpaulins and blankets into Karen State in 2008 for distribution among internally displaced communities. [Photo: © FBR]
19.6 Situation in Arakan State

Unfortunately, very little information has been made available concerning the overall numbers of IDPs in Arakan State. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (iDMC) has estimated that there are as many as 80,000 IDPs living in hiding or in temporary settlements in the forests and mountainous areas of Arakan State.53 Meanwhile, there are several hundred thousand ethnic Rohingya who had previously been repatriated from refugee camps in Bangladesh and who now live as internally displaced persons.

The SPDC continued to employ a range of policies in Arakan State during 2008 which results in the persecution of the largely Muslim Rohingya population. The SPDC maintains that the Rohingya, which number approximately 800,000 people, are not native to Burma, deny them Burmese citizenship, and thus render them stateless.54 Of the 134 officially-recognised ethnic nationalities of Burma, the Rohingya is conspicuous by its absence from the list. (For more information, see “Section 18.5: Official List of Ethnic Minority Groups in Burma” in Chapter 18: Ethnic Minority Rights).

A major cause of displacement during 2008, as in previous years, was the continued resettlement of Burman villagers from central Burma into Arakan State onto land which had been confiscated from Rohingya farmers. These ‘Model Villages’, locally referred to as NaTaLa villages (named after the Burmese acronym for the Ministry of Border Affairs) seek to appropriate land and destroy the livelihoods of the local Rohingya population and replace it with that of Buddhist Burman villagers to dilute the ethnic and religious composition of the region in what some commentators have referred to as “demographic engineering”.55 For example, on 23 June 2008, it was reported that over 1,000 acres of farmland was being confiscated from Rohingya farmers in Maungdaw Township to make way for the establishment of new NaTaLa villages.56

Meanwhile, large tracts of land have been confiscated from local farmers by the SPDC throughout Rathedaung Township, especially along the road linking Angu Maw and Ko Dan Kauk village, for use by the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) after natural gas deposits were discovered nearby. Though the CNOOC reportedly rented the land for exploration at the cost of 8 million kyat per 40 square feet, it was not believed that local villagers saw very much, if any, of this money as compensation. In addition to this, local villagers living on four small islands, namely: Nantha, Wet Thet Cha, Krat Thwan and New Maw, also reportedly had their land confiscated by the local authorities after the discovery of gas on the islands.57
19.7 Situation in Chin State

During 2008, Chin communities continued to be affected by the rising costs of living, arbitrary and excessive taxation, forced labour and other repressive policies employed by the SPDC, and as a result, hunger and famine quickly became a reality in many parts of Chin State. In western Chin State, SPDC activities directly influenced the migration of 40,000 to 50,000 people, often across the border into India. Meanwhile, there were a small number of IDPs reportedly living in Paletwa Township in southern Chin State.

Environmental factors have also had a significant role to play in food shortages and the displacement of entire communities as villagers left their homes to search of food throughout 2008. Bamboo is the dominant form of vegetation throughout the region, and during 2007 and 2008 it came into flower, as it does only once every 50 years. When the bamboo blossoms, large numbers of bamboo seeds are produced, which attract rats. This leads to an explosion in the population of rats and other similar rodents, which turn on villagers’ crops once the bamboo seeds have been depleted. Entire fields are quickly decimated by the hoards of rats. For many communities, less than ten percent of their entire harvests remained after the rats had attacked their crops. (For more information, see Chapter 18: Ethnic Minority Rights). In spite of the scale of the crisis, the SPDC did nothing to help the people or to provide aid to local communities. Instead, the authorities are reported to have seized food aid donated by private persons and church groups and to have resold them at overpriced rates to the people supposed to receive the aid in the beginning. Hundreds of families have left the area in search of food after they had depleted what little they had left.

In July 2008, the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) reported that over 400 people from 93 separate families from 2 different villages in Paletwa Township had crossed the border into Mizoram State, India in search of food. According to the CHRO, the exodus from this area had begun in October 2007 and there were indications that many more people would flee across the border into Mizoram in the future. The CHRO had estimated that at the time, at least 50,000 people, or approximately 10 percent of the entire population of Chin State was in desperate need of food.
Later, on 19 August 2008, it was reported that approximately 2,000 ethnic Khami (a sub-group of the Chin) villagers from Paletwa Township were forced to migrate to Saiha and Lawngtlai Provinces in Mizoram State, India due to the severe food shortages.62

In parts of Falam and Matupi Townships, civilian farmers were reportedly prohibited from clearing new forests for the 2008 cultivation season, despite the severe food shortages facing local communities.63  This edict was allegedly issued by Tactical Operations Commander Colonel Zaw Myint Oo, commanding officer of Tactical Operations Command (TOC) #3, in November 2007.64  In February 2008, it was reported that the SPDC had also enacted a new series of taxes demanding that each household provide 2,000 kyat and 12 tins (126 kg / 276 lbs) of paddy upon harvest, placing further hardship on already-poor and struggling communities. The original report, however, failed to elaborate on the nature of these taxes.65

In March 2008, as a direct result of the food insecurity caused by the flowering bamboo, the resultant and marked increase in food prices and the complete lack of aid provided by the SPDC, a mass migration was reported to have taken place in Tonzang Township. During 2008, rice prices had risen to 19,000 kyat per sack, up from 16,000 kyat in 2006. Meanwhile, even in the face of such hardship and widespread hunger, it was reported that the Tonzang Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) chairperson had demanded 1,500 kyat from every household in the township for the SPDC’s physic nut cultivation program.66

On 19 June 2008, it was reported that an ethnic Meitei insurgent unit affiliated with the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) from Manipur State in Northeast India planned to establish a new camp in Phaisat village of Tonzang Township, displacing approximately 100 villagers in the process. According to local villagers, the group had offered them 300,000 kyat if they would leave their homes voluntarily by the first week of June 2008. It is not known if coercion or force was used to relocate the villagers, but it was reported that many families had already moved to nearby Kale and Tamu Townships in neighbouring Sagaing Division.67

This photograph, taken on 15 May 2008, two weeks after the Cyclone Nargis had struck, depicts a group of children still waiting to receive aid while taking shelter at the Hlay Htat Chaung Monastery in Labutta Township, Irrawaddy Division after their home had been destroyed. [Photo: © Moe Aung Tin/Irrawaddy]
19.8 Situation in Irrawaddy Division

Much of the displacement in Irrawaddy Division during 2008 occurred as a result of Tropical Cyclone Nargis, a category three cyclone which hit the Burmese coastline on 2-3 May 2008. According to official figures released by the SPDC, the cyclone killed more than 84,000 people and left 54,000 unaccounted for. However, aid groups and UN statistics estimate the death toll to be in the vicinity of 128,000 to 180,000 people. The cyclone affected those living in three separate divisions, namely, Irrawaddy, Rangoon and Pegu Divisions as well as Mon and Karen States. The total number of people living in these areas who were adversely affected by the cyclone has been estimated to be a staggering 2.4 million people. As many as 45 temporary resettlement sites of varying sizes housed an estimated 40,000 cyclone victims.

According to the United Nations, 95 percent of Bogale Township, which is comprised of about 400 villages, was destroyed by the cyclone. Meanwhile, in neighbouring Labutta Township, one of the worst hit areas, it was estimated that a little over half of the 374,000 residents were severely affected by the cyclone and half of its 500 villages were destroyed.

Despite having received advanced warning of the approaching storm from the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) on 26 April 2008, the regime failed to adequately inform the people living in the areas affected by the cyclone. The IMD had reportedly issued 41 separate general warnings to the SPDC, yet the state-controlled media waited until 2 May 2008, the day the cyclone struck, to issue a cyclone alert in the New Light of Myanmar’s “Storm News” section, predicting “widespread rain or thundershowers” with winds reaching 110 km per hour. State television meanwhile delivered absolutely no warnings nor issued any advice prior to the impact of the cyclone.

The United Nations and Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have separately estimated that it will cost one billion US dollars to rebuild Burma after the cyclone left an estimated 140,000 people dead or missing and over two million survivors in need of aid. The UN further estimated that just under half of the 2.4 million people who had been affected by the cyclone would need assistance for six months, and according to the World Food Programme (WFP), some 724,000 people in Irrawaddy Division alone would require food aid for at least six months. Meanwhile, it was estimated by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) that 700,000 children were in need of long-term aid due to the effects of the cyclone.

It was not until June 2008 that Senior General Than Shwe appointed Brigadier-General Maung Maung Aye, commanding officer of Light Infantry Division (LID) #66, to coordinate the military’s response to the crisis. It has been argued that Maung Maung Aye had earlier earned the leader’s trust and respect after having played a key role in the suppression of the ‘Saffron Revolution’ protests in September 2007, during which he had allegedly been responsible for giving orders to carry out raids on monasteries and fire on protesting monks and other demonstrators. (For more information, see “Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution – The 2007 Pro-Democracy Movement” in the Burma Human Rights Yearbook 2007 and the HRDU report: Bullets in the Alms Bowl: An analysis of the brutal suppression of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution).

According to an article published in the Irrawaddy, the SPDC’s action plan, however, was to simply return cyclone victims in the approximate location of their flattened villages, with no food or water, forcing them into a situation in which they were confronted with hunger, disease and considerable hardship. Meanwhile, international aid organizations were actively prevented from accessing the worst affected areas or denied the visas that would allow their staff into the country in the first place. The junta’s “rehabilitation and rebuilding”
plan culminated with the forcible eviction of tens of thousands of IDPs from the very shelters set up to house and care for them. A full month after the cyclone had struck, the UN had estimated that less than half of the 2.4 million people affected by the cyclone had received any form of help from either the junta or aid organizations.\textsuperscript{80}

Within days of the cyclone, the UN had announced that ten of thousands had died and as many as one million people had become displaced. It was further estimated that approximately 20,000 square miles of land had been submerged.\textsuperscript{81} Unfortunately, this is not a problem which will go away quickly as many of the coastal areas which were among the worst hit were inundated with salt water which not only destroyed that year’s harvest, but will also leave a lasting impact due to the increased salination of the soil.

According to an article published in the \textit{Washington Post}, the junta had formally requested US$11.7 million in reconstruction aid at a donor conference in Rangoon jointly-organised by the UN and ASEAN. Considering that Burma has a GDP of only US$15 billion and that the military officers making this request had failed to elaborate how they reached their damage assessment when as many as three quarters of the 2.4 million victims had not yet received assistance, this request understandably raised a few concerns that Cyclone Nargis could serve the regime as a diplomatic and financial windfall.\textsuperscript{82}

By 20 May 2008, the number of official and makeshift shelters providing refuge to the estimated 150,000 IDPs scattered across Labutta and Bogale Townships alone had risen to 120 separate sites.\textsuperscript{83}

According to the \textit{Washington Post}, in mid-May 2008, less than two weeks after the cyclone, and with millions of people who had still not received any form of aid, the junta had announced a list of 43 companies, many with close ties to the military, which had been awarded lucrative reconstruction contracts.\textsuperscript{84} It was reported that the SPDC had assigned 18 of these private companies to construct between 4,000 and 6,000 permanent houses for cyclone victims in 23 villages within six of the Irrawaddy Division’s townships as well as in Kungyangon Township, Rangoon Division. Among those companies on this list were a number of well known and high profile companies with very close ties to the military, including but not limited to:

1. Htoo Trading Company Ltd;
2. CB Bank;
3. Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI);
4. Burma-Asia World (BAW) Company;
5. Yuzana Company Ltd;
6. Zay Kabar Company,
7. First Myanmar Investment (FMI) Company Ltd;
8. Max Myanmar Group of Companies;
9. Shwe Than Lwin Company Ltd; and
10. Tet Lan Construction Group.\textsuperscript{85}

Quick on the heels of the announcement of the reconstruction plan, a number of reports emerged throughout June 2008 of land being reclaimed in cyclone-affected areas throughout Bogale, Pyapon, Dedaye and Labutta Townships.\textsuperscript{86} Towards the end of July 2008, there were fresh reports of villagers being evicted from their land by the SPDC to make way for the reconstruction project. For instance, one report told the tale of Thein Hlaing, who had built a small makeshift hut from salvaged pieces of tin and wood in the vicinity of his former village on a piece of land that was above the floodwater. Soon after they had completed the new shelter though, an SPDC army officer arrived and ordered him and his family to dismantle the hut and vacate the area as all of the higher ground had been earmarked for a building development and that no one was permitted to live there.\textsuperscript{87}
Approximately 2,000 cyclone survivors took refuge in the Thakya Mara Zein Pagoda in Labutta Township in Irrawaddy Division in the wake of Cyclone Nargis. The monastery’s resources and facilities were quickly overloaded by the sheer number of people needing help, despite the best efforts of the monks and Pagoda trustees.  [Photo: © Moe Aung Tin/Irrawaddy]
On 4 June 2008, hundreds of IDPs who had been taking shelter in State High Schools No. 1 and No. 2 and State Middle Schools No. 1 and No. 2 in Bogale Township after their villages had been destroyed by the cyclone were evicted as the "schools had to reopen". The villagers were reportedly given 20,000 kyat and five bowls (7.8 kg / 17 lbs) of rice and then sent on their way. One elderly woman who had taken refuge in State High School No. 1 had told the *Mizzima News* that, "They are forcibly sending us back to our villages. I dare not go back home. Almost all villagers died in the cyclone and I lost my home too". Such details, however, seemed lost on the SPDC and the eviction went ahead as planned.88

A little over a week after the cyclone, a number of reports emerged of cyclone victims who had taken refuge in monasteries in Bogale Township being forced to relocate to SPDC-administered relief centres.89 Similarly, survivors who had taken refuge in Suu Taung Pi monastery in Labutta Township were forced to move to a camp set up on a football ground, which could accommodate about 1,000 people in about 60 tents.90 On 16 May 2008, it was reported that as many as 80,000 survivors who had taken shelter in various schools and monasteries had been loaded onto trucks and into boats to be relocated to State-run camps, where it remained unclear if sufficient food or water was being provided.91

Meanwhile, an estimated 50,000 people who had been seeking refuge in Bogale Township were forcibly relocated to Maubin Township with threats of being beaten if they refused.92 Other similar reports maintained that those who returned willingly were given 20,000 kyat in cash and five bowls (7.8 kg / 17 lbs) of rice upon arrival back in their home villages.93

On 11 May 2008, the *Mizzima News* had reported that the SPDC had established six shelters for cyclone survivors in Myaungmya Township, all converted from local high schools and each housing an estimated 600 survivors. According to the original report, no one was allowed to enter the schools and no survivor was allowed to leave, not even to search for missing family members.94 However, on 16 May 2008, it was reported that displaced persons who had been taking refuge in Myaungmya Township were forced back to their decimated villages in Labutta Township to vote in the postponed referendum on 24 May 2008.95 Later, on 24 May 2008, the SPDC-run newspaper, the *New Light of Myanmar* proudly reported that 9,200 cyclone survivors from 84 villages in Moulmeingyun Township who had taken shelter in relief camps in Wakema Township had been returned to their home villages as part of the SPDC's resettlement plan.96 What the report failed to mention, however, was that these people had been forced to return to
Chapter 19: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation

villages which had all but been wiped off the map without any further provision of food, safe drinking water, medications or shelter. However, in spite of this, it was not until 30 May 2008, that the UN had reported that the SPDC had prematurely closed a number of the relief camps and had been “dumping” the villagers near their devastated villages with little or no aid supplies. At the end of May 2008, eight of the camps which had been set up by the junta in Bogale Township were reported to be “totally empty” by a UNICEF official.

According to an article published in the *Irrawaddy*, beginning on 20 May 2008, SPDC authorities forced somewhere between 30,000 and 40,000 displaced persons out of the shelters in Labutta Township that had been established to accommodate them and back to whatever remained of their homes, thus denying them of desperately-needed relief supplies and medical services.

On 5 June 2008, Amnesty International (AI) reported that the SPDC had forced cyclone survivors to perform forced labour in exchange for food; food which in all likelihood was given as aid from the international community.

On 26 June 2008, the *Irrawaddy* reported that thousands of internally displaced villagers from more than 30 villages in Bogale and Labutta Townships were issued with forced relocation orders by officials from the Department of Forestry on 17 June 2008 accusing them of illegally encroaching on national park land.

As a result of the frequent evictions, by mid-July 2008, the number of IDPs living in temporary camps in Labutta Township had dropped from 40,000 to 9,000 and from 45 camps to 3 camps. Later, on 6 August 2008, it was reported that the two remaining refugee camps for cyclone victims in Labutta Township, the 5-Mile and 3-Mile Camps, were to close on 10 August 2008. The 1,015 families remaining in the two camps were told to return to their home villages. One SPDC army officer had maintained that no one was being forced to return against their will, but rather that they would assist them to return if they wished. However, one Labutta resident reported that local authorities were “pushing” IDPs to return to their villages.

Six months after the cyclone, more than a million people living in the Irrawaddy Delta region were still living in need, receiving only intermittent food assistance and living in makeshift shelters. The WFP estimated that it would need to continue to provide food aid to nearly a million people well into 2009.

The blue tents of the UN-administered “3-Mile” relief camp in Labutta Township offering shelter to cyclone survivors. [Photo: © Aung Thet Wine/Irrawaddy]
19.9 Situation in Kachin State

In the early 1990s, a number of ceasefire agreements were brokered between the junta and local insurgent groups operating in Kachin State. This brought an end to large-scale armed conflict in Kachin State. Following the signing of their ceasefire agreement with the regime in 1994, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) orchestrated the resettlement of more than 60,000 displaced persons throughout Kachin State. Since then, the KIO has implemented a number of resettlement and development programs, and according to the Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford University, the living conditions of the people of Kachin State have drastically improved under the ceasefire. However, forced displacement is still a common occurrence across the state, largely due to land confiscation, natural resource extraction, and large-scale development projects, undertaken by the SPDC and local civil authorities.

During 2008, the movement of peoples out of Kachin State continued. Egregious SPDC policies drove people further into poverty and forced them to migrate to find work in order to support themselves and their families. According to the Kachin Women’s Association of Thailand (KWAT), the leading causes of displacement in Kachin State during 2008 included, but were not limited to, large-scale development projects such as the construction of dams and hydroelectricity power plants, and widespread land confiscation of civilian farm and plantations.

In northern Kachin State particularly, communities also continued to lose land due to increased militarization and military expansionism, despite the existence of a 15-year-old ceasefire agreement between the KIO and the SPDC.

In July 2008, the Kachin News Group (KNG) reported that earlier, in January of the same year, thousands of villagers in Kachin State had been issued with forced relocation notices from the Burma-Asia World Company (BAW), a Burmese conglomerate with ties to Lo Hsing Han, a known drug trafficker. In early 2007, work had commenced on the Chibwe Hydroelectricity Project named after the river on which it was situated as a joint venture between BAW and the China Power Investment Corporation (CPI), a Beijing-based hydroelectricity power company which is responsible for the construction of a series of hydroelectricity dams along the Irrawaddy River and a number of its tributaries. Since its inception, the project has led to forced seizures of land, widespread displacement and the destruction of the local environment. (For more information, see Chapter 9: Environmental Degradation).
19.10 Situation in Karen State

Karen State has long been a source of large numbers of internally displaced persons. Northern Karen State is one of the most heavily militarized areas in eastern Burma. For the past two-and-a-half years, the SPDC has waged an ongoing military offensive against ethnic Karen villagers in northern Karen State. Some sources have maintained that an estimated 147,000 people had been and remain internally displaced in Karen State and in eastern Pegu Division (which corresponds to Nyaunglebin District under the Karen system of demarcation; for more information, see “Karen State Disputed Areas of Demarcation” in the Appendices).

The ongoing military offensive in northern Karen State and the frequent perpetration of human rights abuses which invariably accompany increased militarization have displaced an estimated 40,000 civilians since early 2006. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), since the offensive began, an estimated 150 civilians have been killed by military attacks and landmines, with 43 new military bases being built in the area, using forced labour and materials provided by villagers.

According to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), there were an estimated 70,000 IDPs living in hiding in Karen State and eastern Pegu Division during 2008. The TBBC also maintained that the egregious policies and practices employed by the SPDC in Karen State lead to the displacement of 142 villages and IDP hiding sites across the frontier areas in 2008 alone.

Displaced villagers from Papun District, Karen State return to their hiding site in April 2008 after retrieving food supplies from their abandoned village. The villagers had earlier fled their homes following the SPDC’s establishment of a new camp close to their village. [Photo: © KHRG]

Over 60,000 villagers are currently in hiding from the military in northern Karen State and eastern Pegu Division. Direct military attacks on civilian settlements have continued throughout 2008, although the prevalence has decreased as compared to recent years. In many parts of the state, the junta has further consolidated its zone of control by expanding its network of roads and establishing a series of new and permanent military bases along those roads.
Throughout 2008, the SPDC army continued to expand its control over Nyaunglebin District. According to the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), villagers continued to flee ahead of approaching SPDC army columns into the surrounding forest lest they be caught and either forcibly interned in SPDC-controlled forced relocation sites or simply shot on sight. These relocation sites, typically located close to military-controlled vehicle roads and army camps, served as containment centres from which army personnel appropriated labour, money, food and supplies to support the military’s ongoing expansion in the area. The SPDC had deployed several battalions operating under both Military Operations Command (MOC) #21 and Light Infantry Division (LID) #101 to Nyaunglebin District during 2008. In April 2008, SPDC army soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #276 moved into Kheh Der village tract and established a new camp at T’Gkaw Der village, which they then used as a base from which to mount patrols into the surrounding forest in search of IDPs. Similarly, LIB’s #253, #257 and #335 of Tactical Operations Command (TOC) #2, operating under LID #101, also moved into the area in April 2008 to establish new military camps. Several communities fled deeper into the forest ahead of the arrival of the soldiers, however, the continued presence of the troops and the ongoing attacks that they continued to mount against civilian villagers in the region resulted in IDP communities being prevented from gaining access to their fields and crops, thus causing considerable problems with villagers’ food security. Though the number of overt attacks on undefended villages had decreased in 2008, SPDC troop levels steadily increased in northern Karen state, particularly in Lu Thaw Township of Papun District.

As a part of its strategy to dominate and control the civilian population of northern Karen State, SPDC army units regularly attacked villages and IDP communities throughout the year. In those areas which lie beyond direct military control, the SPDC employs a shoot on sight policy, where by soldiers indiscriminately open fire upon civilian villagers if they are caught in areas that the military is unable to adequately control, irrespective of gender, age, and even in cases where it is clear that their targets are unarmed civilian villagers. For example, on 28 January 2008, 23-year-old Saw Day Kreh Mu from Thay Nwey Kee village, was shot and killed by SPDC army soldiers from Military Operations Command (MOC) #21 as he was walking along a forest path near his home in Nyaunglebin District.

All of the armed groups operating throughout Karen State continued to plant landmines during 2008, severely curtailing the movement of IDPs, and which resulted in a number of deaths. (For more information, see Chapter 4: Landmines and Other Explosive Devices)
On 4 March 2008, two combined SPDC army columns made up of soldiers from LIB #323 and LIB #552 built a new army camp at Htee Moo Kee village in Lu Thaw Township, Papun District. The area is also known to be home to a large number of IDPs who make every attempt to evade the SPDC army patrols which hunt them. As a result of the new camp, an estimated 1,600 IDPs from seven different displaced villages were forced to flee deeper into the forest, and in doing so were forced to abandon 127 hill fields and 94 flat paddy fields. The increased troop movement meant that they were unable to return to their fields or to their former villages to collect their rice stores. Those villages, their populations, and gender distribution are shown in the following table.119

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Village Tract</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>No. of Households</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Plah Koh</td>
<td>Swa Gker Der</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Plah Koh</td>
<td>Plah Koh Der</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Saw Muh Bplaw</td>
<td>Haw Lah Htah</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>78</td>
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<td>Htoh Htee Kee</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Htee Baw Kee</td>
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<td>163</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kyaw Gaw Loo</td>
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</tr>
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<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dteh Neh</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also on 4 March 2008, SPDC army soldiers operating under MOC #4 burned down several homes in nearby Ger Yu Der village. The soldiers burned down nine houses belonging to the following villagers:
1. Saw Nay Htoo;
2. Saw Nyah Hay Muh;
3. Naw Bpree;
4. Naw Shwe Htoo;
5. Pa Way Bpaw;
6. Saw Bluh Doh;
7. Pa Mer Khuh;
8. Saw Oh Htoo; and
9. Saw Nay Htoo.120

SPDC army units continued their operations throughout the Htee Baw Kee area of Lu Thaw Township during March 2008. According to the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen Persons (CIDKP), an estimated 2,000 people from eight villages, comprised of more than 250 families were forced to flee from the following villages:
1. Ger Yu Der village;
2. Saw Ker Der village;
3. Pla Kho Doh village;
4. Haw Lar Hta village;
5. Htaw Htee Kee village;
6. Htee Baw Kee village;
7. Kyaw Gaw Lu village; and
8. Tae Nae village.121

On 5 March 2008, SPDC army soldiers operating under MOC #4 burned down three hillside fields in Lu Thaw Township which had belonged to Naw Bpoh Gay, Naw Beh Htoo and Naw Gkweh Khay. SPDC army units have long employed a strategy of targeting civilian food supplies in their relentless campaign to depopulate the hills of Karen State, in direct contravention of customary international law. Though at the time, the fields would not yet have been sown with paddy, the soldiers deliberately burned the scrub and brush left in the fields by the villagers before it would have had a chance to sufficiently dry out, resulting in an uneven burn, which in turn results in part, if not all of the field being unsuitable to sow with a rice crop.122
Civilian villagers from Bpo Gkweh village in Karen State rebuilding their homes in the forest after SPDC army soldiers had attacked them and driven them from their homes at the end of 2007. Villagers in northern Karen state are often displaced as a result of military activity and have become quite skilled in quickly establishing new hiding sites and constructing new shelters out of locally available materials such as bamboo and palm thatch as can be seen in these photographs. Despite their circumstances, these villagers are able to maintain a semblance of ordinary village life and live with dignity. [Photos: © KHRG]
On 6 March 2008, an unidentified SPDC army unit based in Paw Day Kho village in Papun District fired eight “heavy weapon shells”, presumably mortars, into Htee Moo Kee village where over 1,500 people, from over 200 families, had lived in hiding. Since the attack, many of the villagers were too afraid to return to their fields to prepare the ground for paddy cultivation or return to their former homes to salvage whatever they were unable to take with them when they fled.123

On 15 March 2008, a 16-year-old girl from Htee Baw Kee village, Papun District, stepped on an SPDC-deployed landmine when she had returned to her abandoned village to collect her family’s hidden stores of rice. The landmine blew off the lower section of her right leg. It was believed that the mines had been deployed by SPDC army units as they swept through Saw Muh Bplaw village tract on 4 March 2008 in search of IDPs. (For more information, see Chapter 4: Landmines and Other Explosive Devices).124

On 5 April 2008, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #276 built a new military camp in the vicinity of Ta Kaw Der village in Nyaunglebin District. A total of 132 people from 19 families from nearby Ya Kaw Der village and a further 80 people from 15 families from Thaw Nge Der village were forced to flee, leaving behind seven plots of land already prepared for paddy cultivation in the Ta Kaw Der area and two paddy barns already stocked with 100 baskets (2,100 kg / 4,600 lbs) of paddy in Thaw Nge Der village.125

On 19 April 2008, Columns #1 and #2 of LIB #706 entered Buh Kee village in Toungoo District, sending the villagers fleeing into the forest ahead of the arrival of the soldiers. The villagers were forced to leave behind many of their belongings and most of their food and anything of value was stolen by the soldiers. According to the TBBC, SPDC army soldiers had previously attacked Buh Kee village on 5 December 2007 when they razed the site to the ground.126

On 10 May 2008, SPDC army soldiers from MOC #21 attacked Meh Lay Kee village in Nyaunglebin District, burning down 11 homes in the process. Afterwards, the soldiers remained in the area and continued to mount patrols and attack other villages. The ongoing presence of the soldiers hindered the movement of displaced communities living in hiding and prevented them from accessing their fields and thus their livelihoods. The villagers from Meh Lay Kee village, like others whose homes had also been destroyed, faced a particularly difficult time as they rushed to build new shelters before the annual monsoon began in June while also attempting to evade the roving SPDC army patrols which still hunted them.127
From 14 to 18 May 2008, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #507 patrolled throughout Saw Muh Plaw village tract in Papun District and attacked civilian IDP hiding sites in the vicinity of Theh Hsa Kee and Theh Kee villages. On 16 May 2008, SPDC army soldiers shot and killed Saw Gkaw Ghay, a 27-year-old villager from Saw Muh Plaw village. During the same period in May 2008, another SPDC army unit based at Wah Gklay Dtoo fired five mortar rounds into at the Theh Kee IDP hiding site. Luckily, most of the villagers were away from the site sewing paddy seeds in a local hill field and no one was hurt.\textsuperscript{128}

In the evening of 4 June 2008, SPDC army soldiers from Infantry Battalion (IB) #240 attacked Tay Muh Der village in Papun District, causing approximately 1,000 people from Tay Muh Der and the surrounding villages, including Tha Kaw To Baw and Tha Da Der, to flee. At approximately 7:00 pm, the soldiers fired a volley of mortars into the village, one of which struck the church. Soon after, the soldiers entered the village looting homes, burning paddy barns and destroying property. The soldiers burned down three rice barns containing over 300 tins (3,150 kg / 6,900 lbs) of paddy which had belonged to:

1. Saw Kyaw Soe, age 45;
2. Swa Kwe Lay Moo, age 43; and
3. Saw Gwey Hu, age 55.\textsuperscript{129}

On 26 August 2008, DKBA soldiers operating under Bo Gk'Do, an officer serving with Colonel Maung Chit Thoo of DKBA #999 Brigade Special Battalion, burned down Ler Bpoo village in eastern Pa'an District. The village was reportedly home to approximately 100 villagers and was comprised of 50 households. According to the KHRG, a relocation order was issued to the village on 18 August 2008 so that they could build a new DKBA base on the site of the village. All of the villagers had already fled and had sought shelter elsewhere by the time the soldiers had returned and destroyed the village.\textsuperscript{130}

According to the KHRG, SPDC and DKBA soldiers had been preparing for renewed attacks on displaced civilian villages in contested areas of Pa’an District where Karen opposition forces were still able to operate since 28 September 2008. Similar preparations were also noted to have taken place in Dooplaya District, further south of Pa’an District, presumably so that the joint offensive was ready to resume as soon as the rains ceased in October.\textsuperscript{131}
On 7 October 2008, DKBA #999 Brigade officer Saw Mu Naw Dweh and 20 soldiers under his command burned all eight homes which comprised Gk'Law Lu village to the ground and forced the inhabitants to relocate to nearby Htee Bper village, Pa’an District. Following this, the soldiers continued on to adjacent Htee Bper Kee village where they burned down all four houses there and ordered the villagers to move to Htee Bper village as well. Once interned in the Htee Bper relocation site, the villagers of Gk’Law Lu and Htee Bper Kee were not permitted to return to their crops and were not able to plant new fields nearby. According to the KHRG, the DKBA then forced an average of 100 villagers to perform forced labour each day to build a new military camp. Slowly starving to death, on 15 October 2008, 29 people fled Htee Bper village for a KNU-controlled IDP camp in eastern Pa’an District. Two days later, on 17 October 2008, 43 more followed suit.132

On 2 October 2008, DKBA soldiers burned down 20 corn storage barns belonging to residents of Meh Klaw Khee village, Pa’an District. The following villagers lost their barns and all of the grain that they had contained:

1. Saw Tu Nu;
2. Saw Pa Thu Be;
3. Saw Me Nyat;
4. Saw Baw Ler;
5. Saw Pu Lu Soe;
6. Saw Po Doh Kwa (2 barns);
7. Saw Ma Leh Pa;
8. Saw Thaw Thee Pa;
9. Saw E’Si;
10. Naw La Hay Moe;
11. Saw Tay Ei;
12. Saw Thoo Dah (2 barns);
13. Saw Thoo Du;
14. Saw Kyi Pa;
15. Saw Tu Yin Moo;
16. Saw Htoo Kha;
17. Saw Ter Per Ler; and
18. Saw Hser Gay Ler.133

At approximately 5:30 pm on 3 October 2008, Saw Daw Naw Poe from Meh Klaw Khee was killed by DKBA soldiers who also later burned down the home of civilian villager Saw Pa Da Ray.134

On 6 October 2008, DKBA soldiers burned down five homes in Gah Law Klu village, Pa’an District.135

On 7 October 2008, unidentified SPDC army soldiers razed eight homes and one primary school to the ground in Da Kaw Ka village, Pa’an District.136

On 28 October 2008, the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) reported that DKBA soldiers had burned civilian homes and laid landmines in Ker Law Lu and Htee Per Kee villages in Pa’an District. Four villagers were reportedly wounded by these mines as they returned to the village to retrieve what remained of their possessions. More than 14 homes, 26 corn storage barns and four primary schools were also destroyed in nearby Khaw Poe Kee, Paw Bu Lah Hta, Oo K’ray Kee and Kaw La Mee villages.137

On 4 November 2008, the Irrawaddy reported that hundreds of Karen villagers had fled their homes in Dooplaya District to escape a recent spate of fighting between KNLA soldiers and the DKBA. DKBA soldiers had captured the KNLA battalion #201 headquarters in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District near the Thai-Burma border.138
According to the FBR, DKBA battalions #906 and #907, as well as soldiers from DKBA #333 Brigade had begun attacking civilian villages in Dooplaya District since the beginning of October 2008 in an attempt to control the population and gain access to the coal and zinc mines, and rubber and teak trees which are common in the area. More than 200 villagers were displaced as a result and had fled across the border to seek refuge in Thailand.139

On 6 November 2008, the *Irrawaddy* reported that 512 IDP children from Karen State had fallen ill and four had died as a result of a measles outbreak.140

On 6 November 2008, it was reported that at least 500 Karen villagers had been displaced in October 2008 as a result of the increased military activities of the DKBA and SPDC against civilian villages and KNLA bases in Pa’an and Dooplaya Districts adjacent to the Burma-Thai border.141

On 4 November 2008, one displaced villager was killed and over 1,971 people were displaced following attacks on civilian villages in Mone Township of Nyaunglebin District. According to the FBR, at least 12 villages in the area were looted and destroyed by SPDC army soldiers in this latest series of attacks.142

Karen IDPs from Day Muh Der and Htee Hsih Kee villages in Papun District, Karen State in June 2008 amidst the monsoon rains as they had returned their villages to salvage food and any other supplies left behind that were not destroyed or stolen by the SPDC army soldiers who had burned their village to the ground earlier that month. [Photos: © KHRG]
Chapter 19: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation

19.11 Situation in Karenni State

The Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) signed a ceasefire agreement with the junta in 1995, but the pact broke down after only three months when the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC; the Burmese military regime as it was known from 8 September 1988 until 15 November 1997) had used the freedoms of the ceasefire to deploy large numbers of soldiers throughout Karenni State and KNPP territory. There have been several failed attempts since then to resume talks, most recently in 2004; however the junta suspended all contact with the group following the ouster of former Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt who had masterminded the majority of ceasefire pacts with resistance groups, including a number of splinter factions which had earlier broken away from the KNPP.

Military operations conducted in Karenni State throughout 2007 were said to have forced about 6,000 Karenni villagers to become displaced. A number of Karenni IDPs had fled their villages to adopt a life flight hiding in the forest after being accused by the SPDC and the ceasefire Karenni Nationalities People’s Liberation Front (KNPLF) of supporting the Karenni Army (armed wing of the KNPP). Such allegations are common and are often levelled without any supporting evidence. For example, following a brief skirmish between SPDC army and KA troops in Phruso Township in July 2008, an unidentified SPDC army unit fired a volley of motor shells into adjacent Kapru village, blaming the residents for supporting KA soldiers and allowing them into their village. Approximately 200 villagers fled their homes as the mortars rained down on them, leaving the entire village abandoned.

On 8 July 2008, Chairman of Karenni Refugee Camp Committee (KnRCC), Khu Pho Pya, maintained that since January 2008, 165 Karenni villagers from Shadaw and Phruso Townships had abandoned their homes to flee to refugee camps in Thailand after having been accused by the SPDC of having contact with opposition forces.

The sites of the Upper and Lower Paunglaung Dams in Karenni State. The shaded area represents the area that is home to the ethnic Kayan who will be adversely affected by the dam’s construction. [Photo: © KWU]
As of October 2007, there were an estimated 81,000 IDPs living in Karenni State. The majority of this number were living in conditions of abject poverty in ceasefire areas administered by the various Karenni ceasefire groups, while an estimated 10,000 were living in hiding from the SPDC and those same ceasefire groups. According to the Thailand-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), the total number of IDPs in Karenni State had shrunk considerably to 53,330 by October 2008. Of this number, 5,000 were reported to be living in forced relocation sites, 9,300 were said to be living in hiding in the forests, and 39,000 were believed to be living in ceasefire zones under the administration of the KNPLF, and to a lesser extent the Karenni Solidarity Organization (KnSO) and the Kayan New Land Party (KNLP). This last figure representing those IDPs living in ceasefire areas is down considerably from 66,200 in 2007. In an attempt to explain this significant reduction, the TBBC has argued “the SPDC’s expansion into ceasefire areas and harassment of villagers has effectively reduced the displaced population under the administration of [the] KNPLF.”

SPDC army troop deployments in Karenni State decreased in 2008 over previous years, however, military patrols concentrated around strategic locations continued to pose a threat to livelihoods. Approximately 1,000 civilian villagers were believed to have been newly displaced during 2008. The widespread use of forced labour, forced relocation for junta-sponsored development projects and sporadic clashes between the SPDC and the KA were reported to be the leading causes of displacement in 2008. At least 90 acres of agricultural land had been confiscated from local villagers in Loikaw, Phruso, and Bawlake Townships during 2008.

Over the past year, the SPDC had offered the KNPLF concessions to a variety of lead and tin mining projects south of Mawchi. According to the TBBC, work on the project commenced in April 2008, and in the six months since then, three villages had been displaced, over 50 acres of villagers’ paddy fields had been confiscated and many new landmines had been deployed around the perimeter of the site to protect it from sabotage by KA forces.

On 9 July 2008, the Karenni Social Welfare and Development Centre (KSWDC) estimated that approximately 4,000 IDPs were hiding in the forest in Pasawng Township, after having fled their villages due to a fear of attacks by SPDC army soldiers. According to unnamed local sources, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #427, LIB #428 and LIB #337 had been patrolling throughout Pasawng Township and had clashed with KA soldiers on six separate occasions since January 2008.

The site of the Upper Paunglaung Dam in Karenni State. Rights groups have estimated that the construction of the dam will inundate at least 12 civilian villages and displace an estimated 3,500 people. [Photo: © YMEC]
19.12 Situation in Mon State

A ceasefire agreement between the SPDC and the New Mon State Party (NMSP) signed in 1995 resulted in the forced migration of over 10,000 civilians within Mon State, many of who crossed the border into Thailand seeking refuge. Since then, ongoing military occupation and confiscation of farmland and widespread SPDC development initiatives have resulted in the continued flow of displaced persons through and from Mon State. Approximately 50,000 civilians were estimated to be internally displaced in Mon State in 2007, the vast majority of whom were living under the administration of the NMSP. By October 2008, the internally displaced population of Mon State had decreased slightly to an estimated 47,700 persons.

The TBBC has estimated that of the 47,700 IDPs living in Mon State during 2008, approximately 90 percent, or 42,100 individuals, lived in ceasefire areas administered by the SPDC-allied NMSP. A further 4,800 IDPs were said to live in forced relocation sites, almost exclusively in Ye Township, while an additional 800 IDPs were believed to be living in hiding in the forests beyond the control of the SPDC or the NMSP.

Though the NMSP had brokered a ceasefire agreement with the junta in 1995, the Monland Restoration Party (MRP), a small Mon armed opposition group, continued its armed struggle against the central military regime in the southern parts of Mon State and the northern part of Tenasserim Division throughout 2008. According to the TBBC, civilian villagers in southern Ye Township are often caught between demands for support from the MRP and retaliation from the military for allegedly being rebel sympathisers. For example, following a brief skirmish between the SPDC and the MRP in June 2008, the former launched a concerted three month campaign against the latter. According to the TBBC, “one of [their] first acts was to torture three village committee members during interrogation and not release them until a suitable bribe had been paid by the families”. Fearing similar treatment, hundreds of villagers from the region fled their homes to neighbouring villages or into areas administered by the NMSP.

Parts of Mon State were also affected by Tropical Cyclone Nargis which struck the Burmese coastline on 2-3 May 2008, albeit to a far lesser degree than the coastal areas of western Burma such as parts of Arakan State, and Irrawaddy and Rangoon Divisions. A number of Mon State’s coastal townships including Thaton, Chaungzon, Mudon, Thanbyuzayat and Ye Townships were all adversely affected. Some commentators have maintained that the coastal fishing communities Ye Township were among the worst affected with more than 150 homes which were destroyed in four separate villages.
19.13 Situation in Pegu Division

Please note that much of the information related to forced relocation and internal displacement in Pegu (Bago) Division has been included under “Section 19.10: Situation in Karen State” above. The demarcation of eastern Pegu Division is disputed. While the area is officially a part of Pegu Division, the KNU, and the Karen civilians who live in the area, refer to it as Nyaunglebin District of Karen State. (For more information, see “Karen State Disputed Areas of Demarcation” in the Appendices). For the purposes of this report, the HRDU has retained the names and systems of demarcation used by the villagers themselves. Reliable information for the rest of the state lying to the west of the Sittaung River is, like other parts of central Burma, unfortunately, largely unavailable.

According to the TBBC, there were an estimated 44,500 IDPs living in eastern Pegu Division during 2008. This represented an increase of 13,600 over the previous year. While the area was once host to a number of DKBA battalions, there have not been any ceasefire groups operating in the region for several years. As such, the TBBC did not report any IDPs living in ceasefire areas in eastern Pegu Division. The IDP population in the region was fairly evenly distributed between those living in forced relocation sites with 23,500, and those living in hiding in the forests with 21,000. The ongoing offensive that the SPDC has waged against Karen civilians since late 2005 is likely the leading cause of the increase in IDP numbers over the past year. Continuing attacks on undefended civilian villages has resulted in greater numbers of IDPs taking to life in the forests as they attempt to evade SPDC army patrols. Similarly, the increased military presence in the area has resulted in more villages being forcibly relocated into SPDC-garrisoned forced relocation sites. (For more information, see “Section 19.10 Situation in Karen State” above).

Karen IDPs fleeing from an SPDC army attack on their village in Nyaunglebin District, Karen State. The villagers were forced to flee with whatever they were able to carry on their backs, and those who were unable to walk under their own power were carried. This photograph depicts two Karen villagers carrying an injured villager to safety in a makeshift palanquin. [Photo: © KHRG]
19.14 Situation in Rangoon Division

Like many of Burma’s extensively militarized central divisions, precious little reliable information is made available about internal displacement in Rangoon Division. However, the available information has suggested that the forced relocation of civilian communities continued throughout 2008, most notably in relation to Tropical Cyclone Nargis.

On 6 May 2008, just three days after the cyclone had struck, more than 1,000 of the 3,000 cyclone victims from Block #20 in Hlaingthaya Township, Rangoon Division were ordered to leave a temporary shelter in a primary school east of Rangoon. The junta had said that only the elderly and those unable to work were permitted to stay and that all others were expected to return and rebuild their homes.159

Meanwhile, on 11 May 2008, the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) reported that cyclone survivors in Hlaingthaya Township, of which there were more than 10,000, had not yet received any assistance from the junta and that many had been forced out of schools and other public buildings where they had been taking shelter by SPDC and Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) authorities.160

Similarly, on 14 May 2008, the DVB reported that 620 cyclone victims who had taken shelter in Dawbon Township were ordered to leave by ward chairman Nay Lun Aung, despite having nowhere to go and no food with which to feed their families. “We were told to move out and that if we refused, we would be forcibly removed by the army”, said one of the IDPs.

He continued:

“They threatened to prosecute house owners who accept refugees and they only feed us with sour boiled beans. … All the chairmen are grabbing all the donations, … No matter how many people you have in your family, they only give you two tins of condensed milk, rice and three potatoes. … We get no international aid, we only hear about it. We have nowhere to stay and are living on the streets, and the children are suffering from dysentery.”161

On 21 May 2008, an unidentified private donor reported that an estimated 1,000 cyclone survivors who had been taking refuge in various monasteries, churches and IDP camps in Kawhmu Township had been pressured by the SPDC to return to their homes. According to the original report, the donor had visited one of the camps to donate rice to the IDPs but found that the camps were being dismantled: “I was told that local police had people in the refugee camps to remove the camp signposts and Red Cross flag poles, and told the refugees to go home. … I found out that the same thing happened in four places”.162

On 22 May 2008, it was reported that approximately 90 cyclone victims housed in a community hall in Dagon Myothit South Township were forced to move by the SPDC so that the hall could be used as a polling station for the postponed constitutional referendum which was held on 24 May 2008.163

On 30 May 2008, it was reported that more than 400 cyclone survivors from Irrawaddy Division who had been taking shelter in a Christian missionary compound in Alon Township were ordered back to their villages, and given less than 24 hours notice before the eviction was to be enforced. According to reports, the majority of the IDPs were Christian ethnic Karen villagers from Labutta Township who had earlier been brought to the compound by the Yangon Karen Baptist Home Missions. All of the 400-plus IDPs were reportedly loaded onto 11 military trucks and driven away from the compound the day after the order had been given. A church official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, stated that “It was a scene of sadness, despair and pain. … Those villagers lost their homes, their family members and
the whole village was washed away. They have no home to go back to”. The official added that they were told that the IDPs would be first taken to an SPDC-administered relief site in Myaungmya Township before being returned to their own villages in Irrawaddy Division. Anupama Rao Singh, Regional Director of UNICEF was quoted as having said that:

“Premature resettlements to the villages, even if it’s voluntary, will cause serious risks to the refugees. … Many of the villages remain inundated with water, making it difficult to rebuild. There is also a real risk that once they are resettled, they will be invisible to aid workers. Without support and continued service to those affected, there is a risk of a second wave of disease and devastation”.

Forced evictions and the premature closure of relief camps continued throughout May and well into June and July, despite warnings such as the one above.

On 2 June 2008, the Mizzima News reported that the SPDC had closed and emptied several aid camps in Rangoon Division, including a number in Kungyangon Township. An aid worker who had just returned from the devastated region stated that, "I saw refugees from two schools and a monastery in Kun Chan Kone [Kungyangon] leaving for their villages. Those who did not want to leave were being forcibly removed to an open field".

On 3 June 2008, it was reported that hundreds of cyclone victims who had been taking shelter in the Yaukphaw San Nyein prayer hall in Ward No. 26 of Dagon Myothit South Township had been order by Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) officials to return to their destroyed villages. Despite having only received aid from independent NGOs and UNICEF, the IDPs were reportedly informed that, "The government has given you enough assistance and relief material so you must go back home by June 4 which is the cut off date. Or else local authorities will come and evict all of you from here".

On 6 June 2008, the DVB reported that authorities in the Shwe Paukkkan area of North Okkalapa Township had ordered cyclone victims living in relief camps to return to their villages, threatening those who refused with relocation to northern Arakan State:
"We've been at this camp since the day after the cyclone hit our homes. So far we have received no assistance from the government and now the local authorities are forcing us to go back to our homes. … They said those who refused to leave the camp would be relocated to [Buthidaung or Maungdaw] township[s] in Arakan State with an allowance of 100,000 kyat. … We don't want to go and live there but we have no homes left to go to." 167

Considering that these IDPs, and hundreds of thousands more just like them, had received no aid whatsoever from the SPDC, any and all claims made by the regime to the effect of providing an allowance to returnees are highly questionable. Despite the absurdity of such claims, it remains unclear, why these IDPs were threatened with relocation to northern Arakan State. While no concrete evidence has thus far been made available, it is possible that the SPDC was attempting to coerce these villagers into relocating in the hope of receiving their allowance so that they could requisition their land for intended development projects.168

On 25 July 2008, it was reported that more than 600 families living in Twante Township, were issued with relocation orders so that their homes could be demolished and the land used for the construction of 500 new homes for cyclone victims. Though the original report failed to elaborate, even if the land was used for its stated purpose, it is highly unlikely that any homes built on the site would be offered to cyclone survivors free of charge.169

A woman hangs donated clothes at a relief camp in Labutta Township in Irrawaddy Division. An estimated 2.4 million civilians from Irrawaddy, Rangoon, and Pegu Divisions as well as Arakan, Karen and Mon States were adversely affected and an estimated 140,000 people killed by the cyclone. [Photo: © AFP]
**19.15 Situation in Shan State**

According to the TBBC, Shan State is home to more IDPs than any other region in eastern Burma. During 2008 there were an estimated 135,000 IDPs living in Shan State, down from 163,800 in 2007. Though this represents a decrease of 28,800 IDPs over the past 12 months, the TBBC maintained that approximately 24,100 IDPs had been newly displaced over the past year, although how the mathematics of this worked was not explained. According to the estimates provided by the TBBC, approximately 30 percent of all IDPs living in eastern Burma during 2008 are in southern Shan State. It must be noted, however, that this estimate is likely to be extremely conservative, as the TBBC survey is only able to provide data from 12 of the 55 townships which comprise Shan State. All 12 of these townships lie in southern Shan State in areas where the Shan Relief and Development Committee (SRDC) field researchers were able to gain access. Unfortunately, reliable information for the rest of the state has not been made available.

Almost 70 percent, or 92,400, IDPs in Shan State during 2008 were reported as living in areas administered by various SPDC-allied ceasefire groups. A further 26,100 IDPs were living in forced relocation sites, while an estimated 16,500 were reported to be living in hiding.

As in previous years, human rights abuses related to SPDC infrastructure development and private enterprise projects were the leading cause of displacement in Shan State during 2008. The SPDC’s attempts to quell ongoing armed resistance in the state and its illegal policies of deliberately targeting unarmed civilian villagers to this end also continued to be a leading cause of displacement throughout the year.

During 2008, SPDC army units confiscated an estimated 152 acres of agricultural land from civilian villagers in Kae See Township without any form of compensation. It was reported that the land had been confiscated to make way for an SPDC coal mining project. Villagers reported that the site would house not only the mining excavation, but also water pumping facilities, offices to administer the project and an SPDC army base to defend it. Villagers also maintained that the soldiers intended to confiscate additional land so as to create an eight kilometre (five miles) perimeter around the site.

According to the TBBC, at least 24 villages in Laikha, Nansang and Mong Kung Townships were forcibly relocated during 2008 by soldiers from the SPDC-allied “Moengzuen Group”. The ceasefire group, comprised of soldiers from the former opposition Shan State Army – South (SSA-S) battalion #758, continued to operate in collaboration with SPDC army units and continued to be responsible for the perpetration of human rights violations against unarmed civilian villagers.

An estimated 13,000 civilians were displaced from their homes in the vicinity of Laikha during 2008 as a result of an increase in armed clashes between SPDC army soldiers and armed opposition groups operating in southern Shan State. Similarly, an additional 3,000 villagers living on the Shan-Karenni State border were displaced following the surrender of the Shan Nationalities’ People’s Liberation Organisation (SNPLO) in August 2008 as armed opposition groups and the SPDC competed for resources in what was previously a Pa’O ceasefire area.

On 26 June 2008, the Shan Herald Agency for News (SHAN) reported that further north, in Kunhing Township, an unspecified number of villagers had fled their villages for Tachilek on the Burma-Thai border to evade arrest and abuses at the hands of the military following a clash between the SPDC and the opposition SSA-S. On 17 June 2008, a column of SPDC army soldiers from LIB #524 (Lieutenant Aung Win commanding) were ambushed by
soldiers from SSA-S battalion #759 led by Captain Sai Ywe. The following day, a number of village headmen from nearby villages were arrested and tortured by the SPDC for failing to inform them that the SSA-S were in the area. At the time of the original report, 16 villagers had already arrived at the border, while an unstated number were also said to be on their way.\(^\text{176}\)

On 8 July 2008, the SHAN reported that Long Keng village in Mong Pan Township had recently become deserted after all of its inhabitants had fled fearing arrest and torture by the military. On 11 May 2008, an unnamed SPDC army sergeant from LIB #385 was shot and killed as he was stealing vegetables from a Long Keng villager’s field. Earlier, in April 2008, 12 acres of farmland had been confiscated from the villagers so that the soldiers could use the land to cultivate a summer paddy crop, and soldiers from LIBs #332, #385, and #520 were assigned to stand guard over the field. The day after the shooting, the owner of the vegetable field, 45-year-old Sai Ni, was arrested, along with his 30-year-old wife, Nang Poi, and 18-year-old son, Sai Kham. The family was blamed for the death of the sergeant, accused of being spies for the SSA-S, interrogated and tortured, despite repeatedly denying responsibility or having any knowledge of the identity of the sniper. Nang Poi and Sai Kham were later released on 14 May 2008, although Sai Kham was rearrested, along with seven other villagers, all of whom had their land confiscated back in April. Though one of the villagers was able to escape, the fate of the remaining eight villagers remains unknown and local villagers believed that they had been killed. Since the shooting, the villagers came under regular intimidation and harassment by the soldiers. As a result, the remaining villagers all fled, leaving all 45 houses which comprised the village empty. While the original report failed to mention exactly how many villagers had fled, it did state that a number of them had crossed the border into Thailand, although of 22 villagers who had fled to Fang District in Thailand, 19 were soon arrested in a raid. The report did not elaborate, but it is likely that all 19 villagers were repatriated to Burma for having entered the country without proper documentation.\(^\text{177}\)

IDPs on the move in Toungoo District, Karen State in January 2008. This region has long been host to large numbers of IDPs who hide in the forest attempting to evade the SPDC army patrols which hunt them. [Photo: © KHRG]

[Image: IDPs on the move in Toungoo District, Karen State in January 2008. This region has long been host to large numbers of IDPs who hide in the forest attempting to evade the SPDC army patrols which hunt them. [Photo: © KHRG]
19.16 Situation in Tenasserim Division

Approximately 65,500 people were estimated to be internally displaced in Tenasserim (Tanintharyi) Division during 2008. This figure had increased slightly since 2007 when there were an estimated 61,000 IDPs in the region. Approximately 55,700 or around 85 percent of all IDPs living in Tenasserim Division during 2008 were living in SPDC-controlled forced relocation sites. A further 6,000 lived in ceasefire areas, while the final 3,900 lived in hiding in the forests.\(^{178}\)

The active displacement of ethnic minority communities continued throughout 2008 in Tenasserim Division as the SPDC attempted to further consolidate its control over the region. SPDC army units continued to mount military assaults on unarmed and undefended civilian villages in much the same way as has been described above in the section focusing on Karen State.

The SPDC’s grip on power throughout the region is quite extensive and the area is heavily militarized. According to the FBR, 46 SPDC army battalions were identified as operating in the region during 2008.\(^{179}\)

In January 2008, two SPDC army columns from LIB #557 attacked unarmed civilian IDPs in the Htee Law Kee and Htee Po Lay areas of Tavoy Township. Troops burned down 11 homes, destroyed over 150 baskets (3,150 kg / 6,900 lbs) of paddy along with other belongings, and displaced over 430 villagers. Luckily, the villages had received prior warning of the attacks from opposition groups and were able to flee before the attack.\(^{180}\)

According to the TBBC, throughout the year at least six separate IDP hiding sites were discovered and razed to the ground by roving SPDC army patrols. As a result of these attacks, hundreds of civilians fled to Thailand or have assimilated into forced relocation sites where they are regularly exploited as forced labour.\(^{181}\)

For the past several years, large tracts of land in Tenasserim Division have also been confiscated from local communities by the military and leased to foreign companies for joint agricultural ventures such as rubber and palm oil plantations.\(^{182}\)
Endnotes

1 Source: “No end in sight for internal displacement crisis: A profile of the internal displacement situation,” iDMC, 14 February 2008.
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The Human Rights Documentation Unit (HRDU) is the research and documentation division of Burma's government in exile; the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB). The HRDU was formed in 1994 to document the human rights crisis confronting the many and varied peoples of Burma, and to defend and promote those internationally recognised human rights that are inherent and inalienable for all persons irrespective of race, colour, creed, ethnicity or religion. To this end, the HRDU published the first *Burma Human Rights Yearbook* in 1995 to comprehensively document the systematic and egregious nature of the human rights abuses being perpetrated in Burma throughout the previous year. This report, the *Burma Human Rights Yearbook 2008*, represents the 15th annual edition of the *Burma Human Rights Yearbook*, which, combined with all previous editions collectively comprise well over 10,000 pages of documentation and provide an unbroken historical record spanning the past one and a half decades.

All editions of the *Burma Human Rights Yearbook* and all other reports published by the HRDU can be viewed online on the NCGUB website at [http://www.ncgub.net](http://www.ncgub.net) as well as on the Online Burma Library at [http://www.buralibrary.org](http://www.buralibrary.org). Any questions, comments or requests for further information can be forwarded to the HRDU via email at enquiries.hrdu@gmail.com.

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