

15th Annual Edition

# BURMA

HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2008



HUMAN RIGHTS DOCUMENTATION UNIT  
NATIONAL COALITION GOVERNMENT OF THE UNION OF BURMA



**CHAPTER 18**  
**Ethnic Minority Rights**

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## 18.1 Introduction

Before the British occupation and annexation of the Burmese territories, the area known as Burma today was a series of autonomous indigenous nations. Many ethnic groups were separated by geographical boundaries such as steep mountains and wide rivers, creating a vast number of languages and cultures in a small territory. Burma officially has over 134 different ethnic groups, speaking more than 100 distinct languages and dialects. (For more information, see Section 18.5: Official List of Ethnic Minority Groups in Burma below). Approximately 68 percent of the population of Burma belongs to the predominantly Buddhist Burman ethnic group, while over 20 million people, 32 percent of the total population, belong to an ethnic minority group. These ethnic minority groups occupy approximately 55 percent of the land in Burma, mainly in the border regions. The geographical marginalisation of the ethnic minorities of Burma is also paralleled in the country's politics and history.

Under British Colonial rule, Burma was divided into two zones: the centrally located 'Ministerial Burma', which mostly consisted of the Buddhist Burman ethnic group, and the 'Frontier Areas', located in the mountainous regions situated along what are recognized today as Burma's international borders. These Frontier Regions were where most of the ethnic minorities resided. While the British essentially destroyed the local government systems in Ministerial Burma and employed their own systems of administration and government, the area also received some development and investment. On the other hand, while the Frontier Areas retained their systems of governance and some autonomy, their natural resources were exploited by the British and they received little in regard to health, education, economic development, or political representation at the national level.<sup>1</sup> Even though Burma has long been free of British rule, this system of exploitation and neglect continues to this day.

Burma had some indication that independence would be forthcoming from Britain and a number of Burman leaders and leaders from various key ethnic groups made preparations for the new nation in advance. Perhaps the most important document to lay the foundations for the new nation was the Panglong Agreement; signed by the prominent Burman leader General Aung San, as well as by Chin, Kachin and Shan leaders. For General Aung San,

*"The essential prerequisite is the building of one unified nation. In concrete terms it means we must now bridge all gulfs now existing through British machinations between the major Burmese race and the hill peoples, the Arakanese, the Shans and unite all these peoples into one nation with equal treatment unlike the present system which divides our people into 'backward' and 'administered' sections."*<sup>2</sup>

The Panglong Agreement was the key document in the attempt to build a federal, unified Burma. Unfortunately the constitution which emerged after Britain granted independence on 4 January 1948 did not deliver what many had expected. The Karen, Karenni, Shan and Kachin regions were recognised as separate states, with each state represented at the national level. The Shan and Karenni were also given the option to secede after 10 years, leading to a sense that other groups were being marginalised. Any chance to resolve these issues was snatched away when, in 1962, a military regime took power. The regime instated a new constitution in 1974, effectively denying all ethnic groups any sense of autonomy. (For more information, see the Historical and Political Background).

At present, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has come under increasing international pressure, particularly due to its dictatorial governance, the continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi, economic mismanagement, connection to the trafficking of illegal drugs and its negative effect on the region as a whole. On top of these defects, the issue of ethnic minority rights (or lack thereof) has had the international community in an uproar.

In an apparent attempt to foster a sense of legitimacy, the SPDC announced in 2005 that it was resuming the National Convention and the constitution drafting process. The National Convention (NC) was begun in 1993 but was often suspended until it finally adjourned in 1996, having accomplished very little and certainly nothing concretely democratic.<sup>3</sup> Only ethnic minorities who had signed ceasefire agreements with the SPDC were invited to the referendum and, echoing the days of British colonial rule, their concerns were not allowed onto the agenda. Delegates were only permitted to discuss a pre-drafted agenda set by the SPDC. Discussion of topics not listed on the agenda was not tolerated and laws were enacted against criticism of the NC, whereby those breaking the law risked a 20 year jail term. The National Convention concluded in July 2007 having (according to the SPDC at least) finally drafted the guidelines for the new constitution. At the final session of the NC, the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) presented a 19-point statement calling for greater autonomy for ethnic groups. In response, the SPDC threatened them with harsh retaliation and further neglect. (For more information on the National Convention, see Chapter 13: Freedom of Opinion, Expression and the Press).

In response to the resumption of the National Convention, an Ethnic Nationalities Conference was held in 2005 to commence work of drafting an alternative constitution. This constitution would give a voice to the ethnic minorities of Burma and protect their rights. This was the first serious example of groups attempting to draft an alternative constitution and it would not be the last.

In 2006, the Federal Constitution Drafting and Coordinating Committee (FCDCC) put out a draft of a Federal Constitution. The FCDCC is made up of MPs, and other members of the Burmese democracy movement in exile, including representatives of women and youth groups. The seminar for the draft constitution was held in territory controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU) in Karen State. The draft of the Federal Constitution contained 14 chapters and 197 articles and was designed to build democracy in Burma through a genuine federal system. In addition, the National Reconciliation Program (NRP) helped ethnic groups draft their own state constitutions in the event that federalism was realised in Burma. It was reported in early 2006 that Arakan, Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Mon and Shan groups had commenced work on the drafting process.<sup>4</sup>

On 10 May 2008, the regime organised a referendum to vote for a new constitution which would further pave the road for elections in 2010. The referendum was a major issue in 2008, especially among ethnic minority groups, both ceasefire and non-ceasefire. There was no small amount of coercion on the junta's part to vote 'Yes'. One example of this coercion was in the form of National ID Cards which gave the bearer the right to vote and to some ethnic groups or ceasefire group members, the right to movement. In 2008, the junta began distributing ID cards to Rohingya and Arakanese over the age of 18 if they promised to vote 'Yes' in the upcoming referendum. The Rohingya received white ID cards which gave them no privileges other than the right to vote.<sup>5</sup> The Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) also received ID cards, though many non-military Kachin only received white ID cards similar to the Rohingya people. As the campaign entered ethnic areas, government oppression grew exponentially.<sup>6</sup> Finally, with the passing of the referendum and constitution, many ceasefire groups were faced with the choice of running in the election. Some, like the New Mon State Party (NMSP) had no immediate response.<sup>7</sup> Other groups rejected outright any idea of running in this election, while still others accepted it. Some feared that the new constitution would signal the end of armed resistance in Burma, as it would put all armed groups in the country under the SPDC's control.

## 18.2 Ethnic Politics, Armed Resistance, and Ceasefires

The foundations for armed ethnic resistance in Burma were initially laid by the British during World War II. The British used various ethnic minority groups in their campaign against Japan, thus providing many of these groups with their first formal military training. Karen, Kachin and the Chin people were heavily recruited into the British army and some of them never completely disarmed following independence.

Following Independence in 1948, many ethnic minorities were left severely disappointed at being denied the right to secession, especially after fighting so loyally for the British during the War. In 1949, the Karen took up arms in what would later become the longest running civil war on the planet. Over time, numerous other ethnic groups followed the example of the Karen and took up arms in opposition to the central Burman-dominated administration, although many of these groups did not take up arms until the military coup of 1962.

Over Burma's decades of civil war, the junta has implemented numerous methods of rooting out ethnic resistance. One of the most devastating strategies was employed in the early 1970's and is still used today. This strategy, dubbed the 'Four Cuts Policy' (*Pya Lay Pya* in Burmese), attempts to cut off all food, funds, recruits, and information given to armed resistance groups by their purported civilian support base, without which, they would be unable to continue fighting.<sup>8</sup> The intentional targeting of the civilian population as a legitimate military threat is a direct result of this policy and is in flagrant contravention of numerous international laws, not least of which are the Geneva Conventions.

The Four Cuts Policy continued to be employed as one of the central tenets of the SPDC's counter-insurgency campaign throughout 2008. In recent times the Four Cuts Policy has been adapted to control and exploit the civilian populations of conflict areas as well as act as a counter-insurgency device.

The Burmese military regime under its various guises has long employed a strategy of divide and rule among the ethnic minorities to great effect. The SPDC has been no exception to this trend and has persuaded some groups join them and even to assist them attack other groups still opposing the regime. Since 1989 and up until his arrest in October 2004, the former Prime Minister and former head of Burma's Military Intelligence apparatus, General Khin Nyunt, approached many armed ethnic groups with ceasefire pacts which would permit them peace and a degree of autonomy, along with economic concessions, and the right to retain their arms. Although up to 17 ceasefire pacts were signed with the junta, none of these agreements have ever resulted in any sort of tangible solution to the existing political problems. Moreover, all such ceasefire agreements have been designed to prevent combatants from shooting at one another, but have failed to address the human rights violations and attacks committed against the civilian population and have in some cases increased the number of these violations. Many of the newly-formed ceasefire groups have adopted many of the same practices and policies as the SPDC and also commit similar, though less widespread human rights violations against the very people whom they claim to represent, acting as a sort of ethnic arm of the SPDC.

Listed over the following pages are the brief summaries of a number of the ethnic ceasefire and ethnic resistance armies which were operating in Burma during 2008. Please note that this does not represent an exhaustive list of all such groups, but rather is limited to only some of the stronger and more influential groups or those that were active and reported on during 2008.

## Arakan State

The Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) and its armed wing the Arakan Liberation Army (ALA) have been fighting the regime since 1968.

On 19 February 2008, The Bangladesh army detained an ALP member after a firefight broke out near Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tract. The Bangladesh army also recovered some ammunition. Over 100 acres of poppy cultivation were also destroyed.<sup>9</sup>

On the morning of 21 July 2008, a battle between the ALA and the SPDC Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #538 left two SPDC soldiers dead. The ALA ambush took place on a river between the SPDC frontline camp near Myeik Wa and Taung Pyo. Along with the two dead, the ALA sunk the SPDC's boat and seized ammunition.<sup>10</sup> ALA launched another successful attack on 18 November 2008 at LIB #550's outpost at Dochaungwa in Paletwa Township, Chin State. The SPDC received two casualties while the ALA claimed none.<sup>11</sup>

The Arakan League for Democracy rejected the constitution drawn up by the regime stating that it *"is not based on democracy. It will not recognise the rights of the ethnic nationalities of Burma at all"* and that *"the SPDC alone cannot ensure the future stability and economic development of the country."*<sup>12</sup>

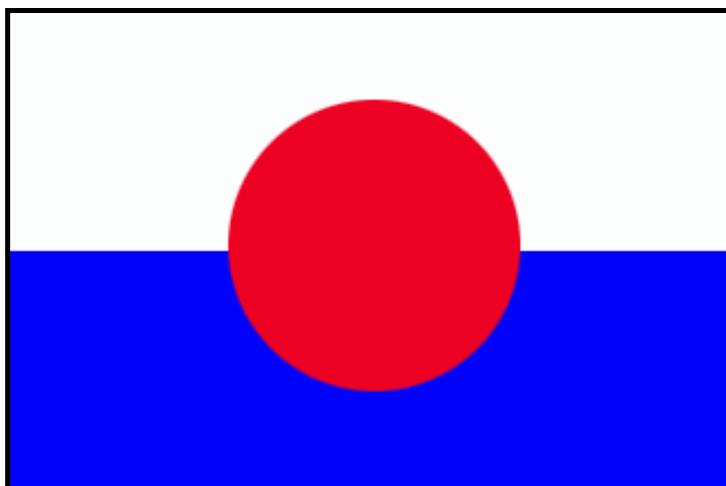
## Chin State

### Chin National Front (CNF)

The Chin National Front (CNF) was founded in May 1988. Since then the CNF and its armed wing the Chin National Army (CNA) have been fighting to establish a federal union based on self-determination and equality for ethnic people.

On 20 February 2008 the CNF, speaking from a Chin National Day Celebration in Thailand claimed:

*"We have already opposed their National Convention from the very beginning. But they don't care and continued with their NC. Now they will hold the referendum in a similar manner despite our opposition. But we have to fight against it with the help of people and the international community."*<sup>13</sup>



The Chin national flag. [Photo: © Jaime Ollé]

On 15 July 2008 the CNF announced that they had started a new development operation in Chin State. The project, called People Power 20 or PP20 is an attempt to promote development in the regional education and health fields. It also prohibits fishing with explosives and hunting in Chin State's forests. The CNF is taxing each household 10 kyat to fund this program, down from 3,000 kyat. They added that if the regime attempts to interfere with the development, they have trained people as snipers to conduct assassinations.<sup>14</sup>

CNA troops ambushed SPDC soldiers from LIB #550 early on the morning of 16 September 2008. The fight, which took place near Shwe Late Wa Village in Paletwa Township was short, lasting about five minutes, but heavy fire was exchanged and one SPDC soldier was seriously wounded. Soon after the event, villagers fled as the SPDC increased its presence in the area.<sup>15</sup>

On 13 December 2008 the CNF officially rejected the junta's 2010 election, stating that they did not support the junta's roadmap and would only join if the dialogue was inclusive of ethnic and pro-democracy voices as well as the junta's. CNF General Secretary Paul Sitha also urged Chin people to follow their own beliefs and to compete in the election if they wish to, as individuals and as political parties.<sup>16</sup>

## Kachin State

### Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO)

The Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and their armed wing, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), was originally founded in 1961 with the stated goal of the creation of a "*Free Republic of Kachinland*" and was once considered to be one of the stronger ethnic opposition groups in Burma – that is until they signed a ceasefire pact with the regime in 1994.<sup>17</sup> As part of their ceasefire agreement, the KIO was permitted to control significant areas of Kachin State including their home base of Laiza on the Chinese border, and was also granted considerable economic concessions, including certain mining and logging operations. The KIO was also authorized to lease large tracts of Burmese soil to Chinese businessmen for profit.

Despite the concessions the KIO have given and received, some commentators have argued that the Kachin people have benefited little since the KIO signed their ceasefire with the SPDC:

*"In the more than 12 years since the truce between the KIA and the junta was signed, little has occurred to advance security or prosperity for the Kachin people. The ceasefire agreement has delivered its benefits only to the Kachin leaders and their friends. Many of them have become wealthy by selling off the valuable resources of Kachin State—timber, gold and jade—to Chinese entrepreneurs. ... The Kachin people benefit little or nothing from this trade."*<sup>18</sup>

The 47<sup>th</sup> Kachin Revolution Day celebration was held from 2 February to 5 February 2008 and despite the celebrations the KIO took the time to send a not very subtle warning to the largest Kachin umbrella organisation, the Kachin National Consultative Assembly (KNCA). The warning which read, "*We know how to play politics with Burma's ruling junta. Don't do and say anything not concerning you*", was in response to the KNCA's request for the KIO to choose a side and decide whether they support the junta's road map or follow a tripartite plan and demand a genuine federal union in Burma.<sup>19</sup>

On 5 February 2008 KIO Vice-President N'ban La Awng stated that:

*"We will not secede from the Union. We'd like the Union (Union of Burma) to be sustainable and united. The Union must be sustainable" and "In the Union, we have to respect each other and have equal rights. Now is the time when the government (Burma's ruling junta) is drafting the country's constitution. If the new constitution is good, we will support it."*<sup>20</sup>

On 6 February 2008, the KIO seized all of its special Kachin Revolution Day newspapers for containing an independent comment in the Public Opinion section regarding the junta's national convention in Laiza. The comment was written anonymously and it criticized KIO vice-chairman #2, Dr Manam Tu Ja's support for the upcoming National Convention. It read as follows:

*"When I as an analyst see this Manau festival overall, it is good that ethnic Shan, ethnic Palaung and ethnic Gurkha had been invited to the festival. But, I am so sad about Dr. Tu Ja's talk which only supported the post-NC process. It was cruel for all participants and it is also irrelevant at the Revolution Day dinner party."*<sup>21</sup>

It was later revealed that the comment was written by a Kachin youth in Myitkyina named Kyang Ying, who promptly explained himself to the KIO.<sup>22</sup> Since 6 February he had been kept on the KIO's Alen Bum military base in Laiza. He was not allowed to leave Laiza because, according to the KIO, he was in danger from the SPDC. This was contradicted by his family saying *"No police and security agents of the ruling junta in the township had visited and asked them anything so far."*<sup>23</sup>

From March 2008 the KIO's Buga Company used the hydro-electric project on the Mali stream to produce 24 hour electricity in Kachin State's capital Myitkyina. The Buga Company sold electricity to residents for 160 Kyat per unit plus a government service fee of 50 Kyat per unit and while distribution was good, some rural areas were lacking service.<sup>24</sup>

On 28 March 2008, KIO leaders and Burmese military officials met at the Laiza Hotel in Laiza. Those involved were:

1. Major-General Ye Myint, Chief of Military Affairs Security;
2. Northern Military Command Commander Major-General Ohn Myint;
3. KIO Chairman Lanyaw Zaw Hra;
4. Vice-chairman N'ban La Awng;
5. Vice-president Dr. Manam Tu Ja;
6. Military Chief of Staff, Gunhtang Gam Shawng.

The meeting was in preparation for a later meeting between Burmese and Chinese military officials set to occur on 31 March, regarding border security.<sup>25</sup>

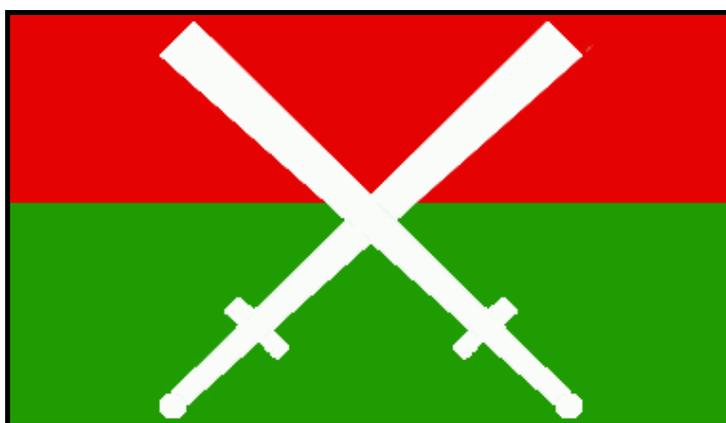
Soon after the 31 March 2008 meeting, the KIO arrested two key Tibetan activists hiding in Laiza. The two activists, both male, had crossed into KIO territory from China's Yunnan province in an attempt to evade capture. Using information supplied by the Chinese government, the KIO arrested and handed them over to the Chinese government that day. As expected, this occurrence did not sit well with democracy activists in the international community.<sup>26</sup>

SPDC troops from the Military Affairs Security Unit in Myitkyina arrested three KIO soldiers in charge of security at the KIO-owned Namtee sugar factory on 15 October 2008. The KIO members were wearing civilian clothing and were official sugar factory staff but they were arrested for recruiting for the KIA.<sup>27</sup>

It was reported on 27 November 2008 that the Burmese Army warned the KIO that if their 'War Funds' collectors were sighted around Indawgyi Lake, Mohnyin Township, they would be shot dead. The War Funds collectors operate primarily in Kachin and Red Shan villages such as:

1. Nyaung Pyi;
2. Lung Tung;
3. Mai Puk;
4. Nat Myi Long;
5. Mai Nang;
6. Na Mawn;
7. Ja Ra Yang.

Following the warning, the collectors went into hiding, KIA Battalion #26 however, continued to recruit in the area.<sup>28</sup>



The flag of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO). [Photo: © Jaime Ollé]

### **New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K)**

The New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K) was formed when Za Khun Ting Ring broke away from the Burmese Communist Party in 1989. In December of that year he formed the NDA-K and signed a cease-fire with the military regime. In 2004 the NDA-K participated in the national convention and supported the SPDC's proposal for the seven-step road map for democracy.<sup>29</sup>

In early June 2008, the NDA-K directly donated 60 million kyat to the Burmese military junta to help the victims of Cyclone Nargis.<sup>30</sup>

In early July 2008, the NDA-K stated that it was competing in the 2010 elections. Chairman Za Khun Ting Ring stated:

*"After the elections, we will be able to have a dialogue with government to come to an agreement – it will suit us better to transform. It is likely that we will be disarmed in the future as part of the government's seven-step roadmap for the future. There will be no outcome if we don't comply with the steps."<sup>31</sup>*

## Karen State

Karen State is home to the world's longest continual ethnic conflict. The Karen resistance began in 1949 soon after Burma was granted independence from Britain and has continued for almost 60 years. The main Karen opposition group is the Karen National Union (KNU), whose armed wing is known as the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). The KNU is widely regarded as one of the stronger resistance groups opposing the military regime, although over the years, the group has suffered a number of damaging splits within its ranks, the most damaging being the formation of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA). This split, which is said to have occurred due to religious differences, came in December 1994 when a large group of rank and file soldiers broke away.

Almost immediately, the DKBA formed an alliance with the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC; as the regime was known prior to November 1997) and betrayed the KNU by showing SLORC soldiers all of the weaknesses of key defensive positions and guiding them through the extensive minefields protecting the KNU headquarters at Manerplaw. As a result of this treachery, Manerplaw fell to the junta forces. Soon after, many more KNU strongholds along the Burma - Thailand border fell to the junta.

The KNU has since lost most of its territory and has resorted to waging guerrilla war in the dense jungles of Karen State. The DKBA was rewarded by the regime not only with numerous economic concessions, but also with control over a number of lucrative border checkpoints where they could make considerable revenue taxing the traders who passed through. Over the past 15 years, the DKBA sphere of influence has increased and DKBA units have a presence in six of the seven Karen districts. However, the DKBA has also embraced many of the same policies used by the junta and are guilty of committing widespread human rights abuses against the same people that they claim to represent. (For more information, see Section 8.4: Abuse of Ethnic Minorities by Ceasefire Groups below).



The Karen national flag. [Photo: © Jaume Ollé]

The Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) quoted a 40 year old female villager from Kawkareik Township in Dooplaya District in May 2008. This quote sums up the stress, poverty and uncertainty that the Karen people face in their daily lives in DKBA areas. The quote reads as follows:

*“My occupation is hill field farming, but at the moment we’re not able to work on our hill fields because landmines have been planted along the path and around our village. Now in my village villagers are facing so many difficulties that I don’t know how to describe it. Villagers haven’t been allowed to go outside of the village since last month. Last year the livestock which the villagers sold in my village was very cheap, because if they didn’t do like this [keep the price low] when the DKBA came, they [the DKBA soldiers] shot the villagers’ livestock dead and ate them without paying any compensation. So villagers thought that something was better than nothing so they did like that [reduced the price]. At the moment, the cows and buffaloes also step on the landmines every day. Now the villagers have to live in the village and can’t do anything. [They] just sit around and look at each other in the face. We can start our hill field cultivation after they [the DKBA soldiers] leave and take out all of the landmines that they have planted, but we don’t know when they will depart. Now the roads are covered with weeds and bushes. On a previous day, one of the DKBA soldiers stepped on a landmine and lost one of his legs while he was trying to find the location of some KNU [KNLA] soldiers. When DKBA soldiers see anyone outside of the village they accuse them of being a spy for the KNU and of having contact with the KNU. They force the villagers to be porters and they forced 50 villagers from villages such as Noh Poe, Htee Moo Hta and Meh Ker Neh [to serve as porters], because if they go without porters the KNU [KNLA] soldiers can attack them. But if they go with the villagers the KNU [KNLA] soldiers can’t attack them. If KNU soldiers attack them the villagers will face problems and most of the victims will be villagers. Villagers also have to do loh ah pay [forced labour] every five days. If they don’t go, then they have to pay 20,000 kyat [US \$16.80] for three days [to avoid forced labour duty for three days]. For the loh ah pay [forced labour] the villagers must cook for the DKBA soldiers, travel with them and follow them wherever they go. The DKBA soldiers also demand rice from the villagers. Each house has to give three big tins [48 kg / 105.6 lb] of rice to them. There are more than 200 houses in my village.”<sup>32</sup>*

The vice-chairman of the KNU, David Takapaw, told *The Irrawady* that political conflicts in Burma should be resolved politically but added however, that the KNU would continue to hold onto its arms in self-defense. Takapaw added that the KNU would still welcome negotiations with the Burmese government and would consider a ceasefire agreement but only if certain conditions were met. These conditions included Burmese troop withdrawal from Karen State and the release of all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi. There have been attempts at such agreements in the past. The last one that had any result took place in 2004 when KNU Chairman General Bo Mya visited Rangoon for peace talks with Burma’s former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt. Any gains made by these talks were lost when Burmese troops launched major military offensives against Karen civilians in northern Karen State and forced around 30,000 Karen villagers to flee. In February 2007, the KNU broke off all contact with the Burmese regime when Major-General Htain Maung and some 300 KNU soldiers defected to the Burmese army.<sup>33</sup>

On 14 February 2008, the KNU was dealt its most devastating blow in recent history when Padoh Mahn Shar, the KNU’s general secretary, was assassinated in front of his home in the Thai border town of Mae Sot at around 4:30 pm. According to the only eyewitness, “Two men climbed the stairs of his home and said ‘good evening’ (in Karen language) to Mahn Sha. Then they shot him twice in the left side of his chest. He died immediately.”<sup>34</sup> The

assassins were unknown but many speculate that they belonged to one of the other Karen splinter groups operating in the area.<sup>35</sup> Mahn Shar, who was 64 at the time of his death and was respected by both ethnic and pro-democracy groups, joined the KNU after finishing his degree in history at Rangoon University in 1966. Hundreds attended his funeral including General Mu Tu, commander-in-chief of the KNLA and United States congressmen Joe Pitts and Trent Franks. Franks, who is co-chair of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus Task Force on International Religious Freedom said *"Mahn Sha gave his life to protect the Karen from the incomprehensible genocide committed against them by the military regime."*<sup>36</sup>

Mahn Shar was eventually succeeded by Zipporah Sein, the KNU's first female leader.<sup>37</sup> Mahn Shar's death was followed by the death KNU chairperson Pado Saw Ba Thin Sein on 22 May. Unlike Mahn Shar, Pado Saw Ba Thin Sein died of natural causes.<sup>38</sup>

### Karen National Union (KNU)

On 16 February 2008, *The Irrawaddy* stated that a KNU senior officer had told the magazine that two more senior KNU military leaders were listed for assassination. The officer said that General Mu Tu, of the KNLA and Brigadier-General Johnny, commander of KNLA Brigade #7, were marked for assassination by both the DKBA and the KNU/KNLA Peace Council ceasefire group. The threats came soon after the killing of Mahn Shar in Mae Sot, Thailand.<sup>39</sup>

On 20 February 2008, *Irrawaddy* reported that members of the DKBA were confirmed to be involved in the assassination of KNU leader Mahn Shar. A source close to DKBA leaders said the killer was most likely San Pyote (a.k.a. Soe Myint), acting with several other members of DKBA Battalion #999. Another DKBA source said San Pyote was not acting under the orders of the DKBA when he carried out the killing. The KNU reportedly intercepted a radio broadcast from San Pyote to Colonel Myat Tun Oo of the SPDC at 4:37 pm. The conversation said that the *'mission'* had been *'accomplished'* and that two of his members were back in Myawaddy. KNU officials also stated that Major-General Htain Maung may have been connected to the killing as well. Maung was a former commander of the KNLA until he broke away with 300 troops to form the KNU/KNLA Peace Council and promptly signed a ceasefire agreement with the junta.<sup>40</sup>

*Mizzima News* reported on 15 July 2008 that almost 60 British Parliamentarians signed the so-called 'Early Day Motion', which urged the UK government to investigate Mahn Shar's assassination. *"We welcome this move by the British parliamentarians because it is not only a moral support but is a fight against injustice,"* said Zoya Phan, daughter of Mahn Shar who currently resides in the UK.<sup>41</sup> This was particularly good news because, despite the Thai police's pledge to find and arrest the killers, KNU leaders did not expect the perpetrators to be apprehended. As a KNU spokesman said: *"As neither the victim nor the gunmen were Thai citizens, I don't think the Thai authorities will take this case seriously."*<sup>42</sup>

On 29 February, it was reported that Sergeant San Htun Hla, Sergeant Soe Thiha, private Kyaw Min Htun and signaler Thein Min Htike, from the coastal region LIB #401's Regiment 1 surrendered to KNLA Brigade 6 Battalion #17. Upon surrendering they gave the KNLA:

1. two MA-1 assault rifles (standard issue rifle to the SPDC army);
2. two MA-3 assault rifles (carbine version of the MA-1);
3. One MA-4 assault rifle (MA-1 assault rifle with underbarrel 40 mm grenade launcher);
4. 400 rounds of ammunition; and
5. M-79 40 mm grenade-launchers.

The Burmese soldiers reportedly deserted the army because of the constant abuse they faced at the hands of their superior officers. The KNU secretary of Do Pala Rah District, Saw Lipton was quoted as saying,

*“They understood the wrongdoing of their army leaders and decided to switch sides to join with the oppressed people. We always have to welcome them. We will now see what they want to do next and do our best to give them assistance in whatever they come up with.”*<sup>43</sup>

A two day long battle between KNLA soldiers and SPDC supported DKBA troops ended with one DKBA soldier and two SPDC soldiers dead (according to the KNLA), as well as one KNLA soldier dead and two wounded (according to the *Bangkok Post*). The battle, which occurred on 1 and 2 July 2008 when the joint forces stormed territory controlled by KNLA Brigade #6's Special Battalion #201, Wal Lay Khee specifically. Thai authorities stopped and detained some of the DKBA forces when they retreated through Thai territory.<sup>44</sup> Some of the shells launched by the regime's troops landed on Thai soil, causing around 200 Thai villagers to flee their homes. The attack was thought to be retaliation for regime troops killed by the KNLA during clashes in June.<sup>45</sup>

The KNU formally denied any involvement in the bomb blasts that took place on 11 September 2008 in Kyaukkyi Township, Pegu Division. The Naypyidaw regime accused the KNU as well as the All Burma Student Democratic Front (ABSDF) and the Vigorous Burmese Student Warriors (VBSW) of jointly carrying out the act which killed two people and wounded nine others.<sup>46</sup>

On 30 September 2008, KNLA soldiers fought with DKBA battalion #999 near Htee Bper village of T'Moh village tract in Pa'an District, resulting in the deaths of two DKBA soldiers.<sup>47</sup> Captain Bu Paw, a KNLA spokesman reported that the DKBA had seized a base of the KNLA's Battalion #201 in Kawkareik Township after two days of heavy fighting during the first weekend of November 2008. He also said the attack on the Battalion #201 base was part of the regime's plan to seize all the KNLA bases along the Burmese-Thai border before the 2010 elections.<sup>48</sup>

On 5 November 2008, KNLA soldiers stormed a DKBA base near Pa-an, reportedly taking control of it after a 45 minute battle. The KNLA also reported seizing:

1. One 60 mm mortar;
2. Three M-16 assault rifles;
3. Two AK-47 assault rifles;
4. One M1 carbine;
5. Two RPG-7 rocket launchers;
6. Two walkie-talkies;
7. A typewriter;
8. Five hand grenades; and
9. 12 DKBA uniforms.<sup>49</sup>

On 10 December 2008, eight soldiers from KNLA Battalion ambushed over 100 SPDC soldiers near Thi Pout Ka Low village in Kya In Seik Kyi Township. The KNLA reported four Burmese soldiers killed and claimed that if the Burmese continued their assaults, the KNLA would continue to attack them. After the attack the village headman and two others were held by the Burmese army but did not face abuse or fines and were soon released.<sup>50</sup>

## Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)

On 5 June 2008, the Independent Mon News Agency (IMNA) reported that sources from the DKBA said that they were under pressure to assimilate into the army as a militia force and operate under the control of the SPDC. This coincided with the recently approved constitution which stated that all armed groups were under government control.<sup>51</sup>

In October 2008 the DKBA, with support from the SPDC, undertook preparations to launch a massive offensive against the KNLA held areas of Kawkaik Township. Over 200 DKBA soldiers from battalions #907, #906, #333 and #999 entered the area during the first week of October and began recruiting and threatening villagers. The DKBA were anxious to take control of the area bordering Thailand's Tak province due to its richness of natural resources.<sup>52</sup>

On 4 October 2008 DKBA soldiers from Battalion #907 entered the Thai village of Mae Klong Khee in Tak Province in Umphang District. They attacked and hurt at least one villager, detained 15 villagers who were believed to be supporters of the KNU and caused hundreds to flee their homes. The village chief's home was also damaged.<sup>53</sup>

The DKBA struck again on 18 October 2008, when three members of a Thai security patrol were wounded when the DKBA re-entered Mae Klong Khee. They opened fire with rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) and small arms near the home of village chief Boonlert Duanmaeklong, whose home was damaged in the previous fighting. The wounded Thai nationals were taken to a nearby hospital.<sup>54</sup>



The Karenni national flag [Photo: © Jaume Ollé]

## Karenni State

### Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP)

The Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) was founded in 1955 and along with its armed wing, the Karenni Army (KA), is now based along Burma's Thai border. In 1995 the KNPP signed a ceasefire with the junta but due to SPDC violations of the ceasefire agreement, hostilities began again. Peace talks in Tachilek in 2007 produced no results.

On 12 February 2008, the KNPP appealed to UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon to remove their name from the list of non-state armed groups who recruit child soldiers. A KNPP official said:

*“The Karenni Army (KA) has stopped forcible recruitment of youth into its army and has already released two statements last year speaking about its commitment to international conventions against the use of child soldiers.”<sup>55</sup>*

Rimond Htoo, secretary of the KNPP was quoted as saying *“We don’t recruit children into our army and we don’t have a policy of forcible recruitment of soldiers. Even adults join voluntarily.”<sup>56</sup>*

On 2 October 2008, the KNPP announced that it was not in fact negotiating an agreement with the SPDC to lay down its arms. The rumors were denied by KNPP secretary Khu Oo Reh who said:

*“We have no plan to ‘exchange arms for peace’, as there has been no discussion or consideration. I want to say that it is pure propaganda by the SPDC – they are systematically spreading false news to cause misunderstandings among ceasefire groups and the public about the KNPP.”<sup>57</sup>*

## Mon State

### New Mon State Party (NMSP)

Resistance in Mon State has been organised since a very early stage by an administrative political group, the New Mon State Party (NMSP). Founded in July 1958 by Nai Shwe Kyin after the Mon People’s Front (MPF) signed a peace agreement with U Nu, the NMSP fought for autonomy in Mon State with active resistance being carried out by its armed wing, the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA).<sup>58</sup>

The NMSP signed a ceasefire pact with the regime in 1995 in return for the right to retain arms in Mon State, some economic assistance and logging and fishing concessions. Despite the end of open warfare, regime authorities have confiscated over 10,000 acres of land since the cease-fire and have used forced labour as well as torture; summary execution and sexual violence also continue to occur in the ceasefire areas of Mon State.<sup>59</sup>

According to reports by *Kaowao News*, the NMSP previously received monthly payments from the SPDC of 4.1 million kyat.<sup>60</sup> All payments ceased in July 2005 however, after the group spoke up in favour of federalism at the National Convention proceedings.<sup>61</sup> The payments were partially resumed in September 2005, although economic concessions to the group were withdrawn and movement restrictions on NMSP members were strictly enforced.<sup>62</sup> Despite some of the setbacks the NMSP has faced since 1995, some argue they have achieved success in the realm of education. According to the Mon National Education Department, there are 157 schools teaching in the Mon language in Mon State and 114 schools offering a curriculum in Burmese and Mon.

29 June 2008 was the 13<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NMSP/SPDC ceasefire and though in the past a large party heavily attended by leaders of both sides was held, 2008 proceedings consisted of a sparsely attended celebration, held at the NMSP office in Moulmein. While many high level SPDC officials were invited, only one officer attended and NMSP Senior Chairman Nai Rot Sa was absent. The situation regarding SPDC troop increases in Ye Township was discussed after the SPDC officer departed. Many analysts felt that the failure of the SPDC to attend the celebration was a sign of growing animosity between the two groups.<sup>63</sup>

In December 2008, a source close to the NMSP leadership said the party would refuse to participate in the 2010 election. However, an official stance has yet to be taken.<sup>64</sup>

On the evening of December 14 2008, the NMSP nearly captured a Thai national who was smuggling drugs into Thailand at the Gu Bowl checkpoint, near Three Pagodas Pass. The smuggler, who was riding on a motorbike taxi, jumped off and fled, leaving behind his jacket. The jacket contained 1,500 amphetamine pills divided into six small plastic bags, two Thai identity cards and a mobile phone. Some sources say the identity cards prove the smuggler, Nai-sar-yan Phin-sari, aged 37, was a police officer but the NMSP did not comment in relation to whether or not he was a member of the Royal Thai Police.<sup>65</sup>



The Mon national flag. [Photo: © Eugene Ipavec]

### Monland Restoration Party (MRP)

The Monland Restoration Party, known up to 2003 as the Hongswatoi Restoration Party, continues to wage low level guerilla operations against the SPDC in between the areas of Southern Ye and Northern Tavoy. (See Chapter 10: Freedom of Movement, Assembly and Association, Restrictions on Ethnic Villagers - Mon State).

On 10 June 2008, MRP troops attacked Burmese troops from IB #31, near Kabya village. Firing from a hill on the troops traveling in trucks and on motorbikes, the MRP claimed to have killed a major, a captain and four soldiers as well as taking one injury themselves.<sup>66</sup>

### Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF)

The Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF) was founded in 1988 and won five seats in the 1990 elections. It was outlawed by the SLORC in 1992. In 2008, MNDF vice chairman Nai Ngwe Thein stated that the organisation would not participate in the 2010 elections and urged the rest of the Mon community to do the same.<sup>67</sup> In regards to the referendum, the MNDF head was quoted as saying:

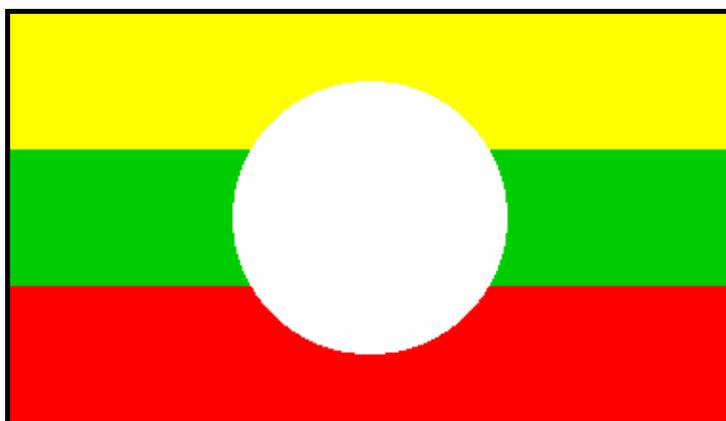
*"We should not waste our time with what the government plans which will not benefit the people. We should concentrate on our movements which will bring us democracy and ethnic rights."*<sup>68</sup>

The MNDF also called for the principles of the Panglong Agreement to be implemented, if only in spirit.<sup>69</sup>

The Independent Mon News Agency (IMNA) reported on 10 April 2008 that, at the 16<sup>th</sup> closing ceremony of the Summer Mon Literature and Culture school, Dr Min Kyi Winn, joint-secretary of the MNDF and chairman of the Mon Literature and Culture Committee in Mudon Township, asserted that because there are no rights to teach ethnic languages in Burma, it is the responsibility of the ethnic people to continue to teach their language and culture.<sup>70</sup>

## Shan State

Shan State is geographically the largest ethnic minority state in Burma, and is also one of the most ethnically diverse. Due to this high ethnic concentration, many groups operate in the area. The SPDC is acutely aware of the threat they pose to its control over the region and have responded by maintaining a heavy military presence. The majority of armed ethnic groups operating in Shan State have allied themselves with the regime and signed ceasefire deals though some groups, such as the Shan State Army – South (SSA-S), continued to oppose the regime throughout 2008.



The Shan national flag. [Photo: © Ivan Sache]

## Pa'O National Liberation Organisation (PNLO)

The PNLO was formed in 2007 after splitting from the cease-fire Shan State Nationalities People's Liberation Organisation (SNPLO) due to disagreements over the junta's policy of forcing all ethnic armies to lay down their arms following the national convention. Led by Secretary General Khun Thurein, the group recently demanded that the government free Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners, form an interim government representing ethnic groups, and cancel the planned constitutional referendum and general election. On 17 February 2008, the group attacked a military Security Affairs office and LIB #423's outpost in See Sai Township, in Shan State. They claimed to have killed SPDC soldiers and said none of their own were lost, though three SNPLO officials were later arrested and taken for questioning at the SPDC's Eastern Division Military Command in the Shan State capital of Taunggyi.<sup>71</sup>

## United Wa State Army (UWSA)

The United Wa State Army (UWSA) is an armed ethnic group that signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burmese military in the early 1990's. The group's commander Wei Hsueh Kang (or Wei Xuegang as he is also known), is wanted by the US government for playing a major role in the region's drug trade.<sup>72</sup>

On 13 November 2008, the United States Treasury Department froze assets from 17 companies and 26 individuals linked to the group or Wei Hsueh Kang.<sup>73</sup>

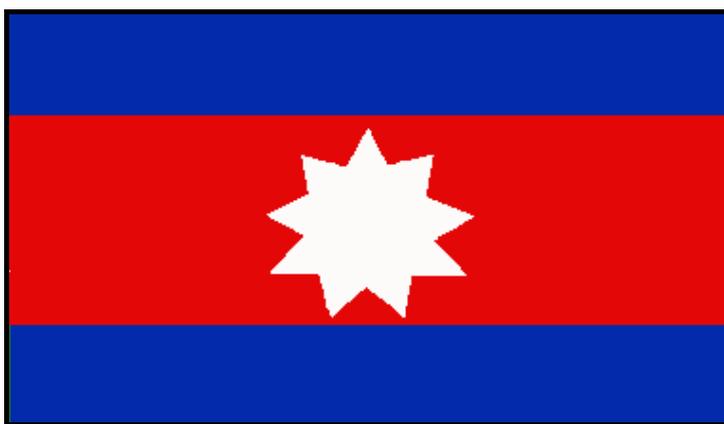
The UWSA's relationship with the junta hit a new low when, at the beginning of December 2008, about 1,000 UWSA troops took part in military exercises in Mongyawn, Mong Hsat Township, on the border of Thailand. The exercises took place following a meeting between the Burmese army commander Kyaw Phyoe and UWSA's 468<sup>th</sup> Brigade Commander Sai Hsarm. The meeting focused on two issues, the UWSA's refusal to leave the Thai border and their refusal to lay down their arms. When asked about the issues Sai Hsarm was quoted as responding: *"For more than ten years, we have been ordered to pull out from the south but we never did. And we are never going to give it up"* and:

*"Sir, I don't understand what you're saying. Does it mean the Wa region is not at peace because we are holding arms? On the contrary, it is at peace because we are holding arms. We are therefore never going to give them up as long as we're alive."*<sup>74</sup>

Following this pronouncement, the meeting reportedly ended abruptly.<sup>75</sup> Some analysts believe the exercises were in preparation for a clash with the Burmese military.<sup>76</sup>

The *Irrawaddy* reported on 16 December 2008, that the UWSA reportedly had around 20,000 troops stationed along the borders of Thailand and China and had recently begun manufacturing AK-47's for use in their own battalions and for sale to other armed ethnic groups for money, to supplement the loss of funds from a ban on opium cultivation.<sup>77</sup>

Finally, in December 2008, the *Irrawaddy* issued a report accusing the UWSA of purchasing 10 tons of pseudoephedrine, the main component of methamphetamine from a supplier in Thailand.<sup>78</sup>



The flag of the United Wa State Army (UWSA). [Photo: © Jaime Ollé]

### National Democratic Alliance Army-Eastern Shan State (NDAA-ESS)

The Democratic Alliance Army-Eastern Shan State (NDAA-ESS) is a ceasefire group led by Sai Leun. It was a part of the Communist Party of Burma and signed a ceasefire with the junta in 1989. In July it was reported that the junta had been pressuring the NDAA-ESS to transfer the administration of villages surrounding Hsaleu, where its 369th Brigade is headquartered, and Nampan, where its 911th Brigade is headquartered, to the SPDC. Leun stated that it was a “ploy to cut us off from our own men and people. It is also aimed to cut us off from our allies.”<sup>79</sup>

### Shan State Army-South (SSA-S)

The Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) was formed in 1996 by Mong Thai Army (MTA) soldiers who were dissatisfied with the MTA’s ceasefire agreement with the junta. While the MTA was known more for its involvement in the drug industry than for representing the people, the SSA-S quickly became known as a legitimate representative of the Shan ethnic minority. Since the SPDC will only accept a complete surrender of arms from the SSA-S, no ceasefire negotiations have ever taken place between the two groups.<sup>80</sup> As far as recruitment goes, SSA-S Colonel Yawd Serk has been quoted saying:

*“As citizens of Shan State, every able-bodied man, 18 upwards, are required to serve in the army for 5 years. Some of the Pa-O young men are fleeing from the area in order to avoid being conscripted. Maybe we still need a lot of publicity to make the people understand their duties to the country.”<sup>81</sup>*

On 20 January 2008, a 30 person SSA-S platoon battled with a 50 person strong SPDC patrol led by Major Thurein Tun at Five Banyan Trees, near Pang Hpone village, Mong Yai tract, Kae See Township. The fight lasted for an hour with SPDC soldiers claiming seven deaths and eight injuries and the SSA-S sustaining injuries to 2 soldiers.<sup>82</sup>

On 14 February 2008, a four man SSA-S unit attacked a 50 soldier SPDC patrol while they were eating dinner near Loi Mak Hin Mountain, north of Wan Lao village, Khun Hing Township in Southern Shan State. Two Burmese soldiers were injured while the SSA-S claimed no casualties.<sup>83</sup>

On 15 February 2008, the SSA-S responded to a United Nations report stating that it uses child soldiers. Colonel Yawd Serk’s response was as follows: *“The United Nations should not listen to outside. We, the SSA invite the UN to come here and see the truth. Our mandatory policy is to recruit people as soldiers from 18 to 45 years old.”<sup>84</sup>* He also added that, *“Although they are over 18 they look like 14 -15 years old because of malnutrition.”<sup>85</sup>*

In June 2008, Colonel Yawd Serk continued to defend the name of the SSA-S when he issued a statement denying the SSA-South’s participation in the murder of eight civilians in Mawkmai Township, Langkher District on 28 May 2008. He was quoted as saying:

*“The SSA isn’t active in the said area. There are only two armed groups there: The Burma Army (SPDC) and the (ceasefire) Shan State Nationalities People’s Liberation Organisation (SNPLO). This kind of policy is only adopted and carried out by the Burma Army. Their favorite ploy is to kill people, sometimes even by wearing SSA insignias, and then putting the blame on us.”<sup>86</sup>*

## Multilateral Resistance Organisations

Despite the frequent splits and factionalism in the various armed ethnic resistance groups, political affiliations between different ethnic groups have allowed for the creation of several multilateral resistance organisations which have attempted to coordinate between the various ethnic minority groups in order to achieve a degree of unity between them and advocate for their collective concerns.

The National Democratic Front (NDF) was the first such group to form in 1976. Created in the interests of a number of ethnic organisations, the NDF was originally comprised of members of the Karen National Union (KNU), New Mon State Party (NMSP), Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), Karenni Nationalities Progressive Party (KNPP), Chin National Front (CNF), Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), Lahu Democratic Front (LDF), Palaung Liberation Front (PLF), Pa'O Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Wa National Organisation (WNO). As with the majority of the multilateral resistance organisations, the efforts of the NDF were purely political and focused on the advocacy of a Federal Union of Burma, and on the equal rights and representation of ethnic minorities.<sup>87</sup> In 1989, the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) joined the NDF in their advocacy efforts with a membership that also included members of a broader pro-democracy movement in Burma.<sup>88</sup>

Later, in August 2001, the United Nationalities League for Democracy – Liberated Area (UNLD-LA) and the NDF together founded the Ethnic Nationalities Solidarity and Cooperation Committee (ENSCC), which in 2004 was renamed the ENC. The stated goal of the ENSCC (and subsequently the ENC) was to facilitate tripartite dialogue between the SPDC, the Burman pro-democracy groups and the ethnic minority groups. In 2005, the ENC commenced work on drafting a constitution for a democratic Burma. Unlike the constitution being forced upon the delegates at the National Convention, the constitution that emerged from the Ethnic Nationalities Council was founded on principals of federalism and protected the rights and interests of Burma's ethnic minorities.<sup>89</sup>

On 10 May 2008, a group of 12 ethnic political parties announced that they were working to dissuade the people of Burma from voting on the referendum and voting against it themselves. The groups involved were the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, Mon National Democratic Front, Zomi National Congress, Arakan League for Democracy, Chin National League for Democracy, Karen National Congress for Democracy, Kachin State National Congress for Democracy, Kayah State Nationalities League for Democracy, Democratic Organisation for Kayan National Unity, Mara Peoples' Party, Shan State Kokang Democratic Party and Arakan Peoples' Democratic Allies.<sup>90</sup>

Soon after the junta's announcement of the 10 May 2008 referendum, the SSA-S issued a statement saying: *"We can achieve our desired ethnic rights only when we emerge as a unified force under one command and one voice. It's time to be united and so our Chairman has called for unity and solidarity."*<sup>91</sup> In response, Khun Thurien, chairman of PNLO stated that: *"Our armed resistance is scattered and not in harmony. Sporadic and scattered movements make our revolution ineffective and don't achieve success. We welcome a proposed united front under one command and one voice, with unity and solidarity."*<sup>92</sup> According to military sources, there have also recently been attempts at cooperation between the SSA-S and their long-time rivals the UWSA.

## 18.3 SPDC Campaign of Abuses against Ethnic Minority Villagers

Throughout Burma, many ceasefire agreements entered into between the SPDC and ethnic armed resistance groups have failed to offer civilians protection against violence and abuse. In many cases, the abuses have actually increased following the brokering of a ceasefire pact. Even when direct attacks and arbitrary killings are not occurring, the SPDC and their proxy ceasefire armies exploit ethnic villagers as forced labour, and also through the use of forced relocation, arbitrary arrest, extortion, land confiscation, destruction of property, targeting of food supplies, rapes, beatings and torture. Control and manipulation of ethnic identity by the military regime can be loosely grouped into three main strategies: direct violence, economic deprivation and cultural assimilation. Of these three, direct violence is arguably the most obvious. SPDC army soldiers as well as ceasefire groups were guilty of performing extrajudicial executions, arbitrarily detaining villagers, and beating and torturing civilians in ethnic minority areas across the country throughout 2008. In Karen State, shooting on sight is common practice for the SPDC. (For more information, see Chapter 3: Extra-Judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions).

Beginning in November 2005, the SPDC launched an intensive military offensive against civilian villages in northern Karen State which continued into 2008. Unlike most previous campaigns, which have typically been conducted only in the dry season when soldiers can more easily move up and down the steep hillsides, the attacks on unarmed civilian villages continued into the rainy season when travel becomes difficult and the roads impassable to vehicles. Rather than withdraw back to their bases at the onset of the monsoon, the SPDC army columns remained in the steep and densely forested hills, mounting military assaults on undefended villages and hunting the internally displaced people who attempted to elude them. SPDC army units fired upon displaced Karen villagers on sight, forcibly relocated those they could catch and deployed thousands of landmines targeted against those that they could not. They also burned whole villages and destroyed villagers' food supplies. These attacks continued, largely unabated into 2008. The sustained nature of the attacks quickly resulted in the single largest offensive conducted in the area in a decade. No offensives of this magnitude or intensity had been waged in Burma since the massive Karen offensives of 1997, in which hundreds of villages were razed and tens of thousands displaced. The Free Burma Rangers (FBR) estimated that by December 2006, approximately 25,000 villagers had fled their homes to hide in the forest where they hoped to avoid detection by SPDC army patrols. During 2007 this number had swelled to over 30,000. However, these numbers must be considered to exist on top of the approximately 120,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) already living in hiding in Karen State.

In its efforts to wipe out armed resistance and control ethnic minority groups, the SPDC typically targets ethnic minority villages, in direct contravention of not only the Geneva Conventions, but various other international conventions as well, many of which have come to be regarded as customary international law and which the SPDC is thus obliged to obey.

Economic deprivation was also employed widely by the SPDC and by its allied ceasefire armies throughout Burma during 2008. SPDC army soldiers and ceasefire armies alike deliberately and routinely razed villagers' crops and food supplies. Roads were blockaded and food deliveries were not permitted to reach their destinations, creating food shortages for those who had come to depend on them for their survival. Perhaps the most pervasive strategy however, was the use of extortion and forced labour. Throughout 2008, villagers were regularly called upon to provide uncompensated labour to assist the military in building new roads and army camps, portering supplies, serving as guides and running errands. Villagers were taken away from their farms and forced to work with little to no regard for the agricultural seasons or the importance of

timeliness in farming. As a result, many villagers were unable to harvest enough food to feed their families because so much of their time was spent performing forced labour for the military. (For more information, see Chapter 5: Forced Labour and Forced Conscription). Similarly, whenever soldiers burned villager's fields and plantations, mounted patrols in civilian farming areas or set up camps near villages or their fields and plantations, it has had a direct impact on the financial life of the villagers.

Furthermore, an elaborate (and at times ludicrous) system of unofficial taxation, tantamount to little more than blatant extortion, has been exacted upon the civilian population by the SPDC and its proxies. Such 'taxes' or 'fees' may range from levies paid in Arakan State before a marriage permit will be granted, through to fines payable in numerous areas of eastern Burma for the destruction of state property after a villager steps on an SPDC deployed landmine, many of which are deployed in areas known to be frequented by noncombatants. (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood).

The third strategy used in the campaign against Burma's ethnic minorities by the SPDC has been their cultural assimilation into the Buddhist Burman majority. Commonly referred to as "*Burmanisation*", one such tool used by the regime is the destruction of culturally important sites or buildings and the construction of more Burman-oriented structures in their stead. In Chin State for instance, Christian Chins are regularly prevented from building churches or holding religious events. Many Christian sites in Chin State have been demolished and Buddhist pagodas and temples built on the site. Similarly, the Muslim Rohingya from Arakan State find it extremely difficult to secure official permission to repair existing mosques, let alone construct new ones. (For more information, see Chapter 8: Freedom of Belief and Religion).

The regime has also enacted certain draconian laws which prevent the expression of culture among many of Burma's ethnic minorities, including among other things a prohibition on the wearing of traditional ethnic dress, performance of traditional cultural ceremonies, or even learning native ethnic languages. The Rohingya, for example, are prevented from adhering to their marriage traditions and from wearing traditional dress while performing wedding ceremonies. Many Rohingya are prevented from marrying at all and must first apply for marriage permits from the regime, the cost of which is prohibitively high, and which are often arbitrarily denied anyway. Moreover, the Rohingya have been targeted for what some researchers have referred to as '*cultural genocide*' in that they have frequently been forcibly relocated off their land and into SPDC-designated sites. These relocations make way for Buddhist Burman settlers from central Burma so as to dilute the ethnic composition of the region through the establishment of incongruously-named '*model villages*'.

As shall be seen on the pages which follow, various strategies of direct violence, economic deprivation and cultural assimilation were employed by the SPDC and its allied ethnic ceasefire armies in the ethnic minority areas of Burma throughout 2008. By far the most extensively documented of these were those abuses which were committed in Karen State. This was due not only to the large-scale military offensive which continues there, but also due to the extensive documentation network in place among the Karen areas. That said, the greater amount of evidence recorded for Karen State does not necessarily mean that the situation there is any worse than in other areas of rural conflict, though this is highly likely. In other words, this should not be taken to mean that fewer documented incidences from other parts of the country equate to fewer human rights violations being committed in those areas.

Please note that the list of incidents shown below is far from complete and should not be assumed to represent an exhaustive catalogue of the campaign of abuses perpetrated against ethnic minority villagers in Burma. Such a catalogue would be a substantial tome in itself and is beyond the scope of the present chapter. Incidents included below have been selected to illustrate the deliberate and discriminatory nature of abuses. Please refer to other relevant chapters of this report for further information on specific types of abuse.

## Arakan State

There are approximately two million inhabitants of Arakan (Rakhine) State. The two predominant ethnic groups are the Buddhist Arakanese (Rakhine) and the Bengali-speaking Muslim Rohingya.

The Rohingya, for the most part, inhabit the northern region of Arakan State, near the border with Bangladesh. The Arakan Project, an independent, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) which documents abuses against the Rohingya, has characterised the area as one of acute poverty which is facing a “*chronic emergency*”, and the Rohingya as facing some of the highest levels of discrimination in Burma. A September 2008 report quoted a Rohingya as saying: “*The regime is trying to take away our identity. We will not be there in the very near future. Our prime concern is that we must not be eliminated ... We are a people on the brink of extinction.*”<sup>93</sup>

Burmese military campaigns against the Rohingya prompted large refugee flows into Bangladesh in 1978 and again in 1991-92. Approximately 20,000 Rohingya refugees remain in camps in Bangladesh.<sup>94</sup> It is estimated that between 2006 and 2007, 2,500 Rohingya were arrested after arriving in Thailand. In some cases the men were sent back to Burma.<sup>95</sup> (For more information, see Chapter 17: Situation of Refugees).

The passing of a 1982 Citizenship Law based on the 1823 list of 135 ‘national groups’ in Burma and Bangladesh’s unwillingness to accept them have left the Rohingya a stateless people.<sup>96</sup> As non-citizens, they are not allowed to travel out of Northern Arakan State and must request permission from regional administration (DaKaSa) any time that they wish to leave their villages. Similarly, Rohingya fishermen in the state capital city of Sittwe have to pay 500 kyat each to the immigration, military intelligence (SaRaPa) and DaKaSa if they want to go out to sea.<sup>97</sup>

Even at those times when Rohingya have purchased and are in possession of valid travel permits, they are not immune to extortion and arrest from SPDC army soldiers. Many Rohingya procure travel documents to leave the economically depressed Buthidaung Township to look for work in Maungdaw Township. However, they are vulnerable to exploitation as they return home carrying the money they have earned. Troops at any number of checkpoints along the road often detain people and destroy their travel documents, thereafter demanding a fine from the person and stealing their money.<sup>98</sup> A former member of the NaSaKa stated in an interview: “*Throughout my life in the NaSaKa, I was used to this system of arresting Muslims, asking for money, torturing them, every day. We only arrested Muslims, not Rakhines.*”<sup>99</sup>

According to author Benedict Rogers:

*“It is almost impossible to obtain permission to renovate, repair, rebuild or extend mosques or other religious buildings. In the past three years, 12 mosques in northern Arakan have been demolished, and a large number were closed in 2006. Since 1962, I was told, not a single new mosque has been built. Religious leaders have been jailed for illegally renovating mosques.”*<sup>100</sup>

Restrictions on movement also apply to those seeking medical care for cases where treatment is not locally available due to the extremely low quality of healthcare services in the region. (For more information, see Chapter 7: Right to Health). Rohingya’s are further restricted from working in most areas of public service. This includes working as nurses, civil servants and teachers. The issue of teachers is particularly pressing due to the fact that most teaching jobs go to the Buddhist Rakhines or Burmans who have a reputation for quitting in the middle of the school year, severely impeding the Rohingya children’s education.<sup>101</sup>

As stated above, for the past several years, the Ministry for the Development of Border Areas and National Races has forcibly relocated the Rohingya off the land to make way for settlers brought in from other areas, usually from around Rangoon and sometimes even foreigners from Bangladesh. SPDC army soldiers are frequently used to enforce such evictions and to pressure Rohingya farm owners to sign over their land. On occasion the soldiers utilise torture and imprisonment to secure the signatures on those evicted for 'legal' documents, which is ironic in that land ownership documents do not exist in Burma and that the state retains ownership of all agricultural land.<sup>102</sup> (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood). Land confiscated from Rohingyas has typically been used to establish 'model villages', also known as NaTaLa villages, designed to dilute the ethnic composition of the areas by relocating Buddhist Burman settlers into areas traditionally inhabited by the Rohingya. According to a source in the regime, over 40 model villages with a total of over 20,000 settlers have been set up in the townships of Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung, in northern Arakan State.<sup>103</sup> It must be noted that while the Rohingya bear the overwhelming brunt of human rights abuses in Arakan State, the Arakanese are also subjected to extortion and forced labour.



A Rohingya villager and his son after they had fled to a refugee camp in Bangladesh. The Rohingya are arguably the most oppressed ethnic minority in Burma. [Photo: © David Swanson/IRIN]

In early January, there were reports of villagers being used as forced labour throughout Northern Arakan State. Duties included carrying wood and bamboo for the military forces active near Buthidaung Township and building 100 houses for the NaSaKa in Nurulapara.<sup>104</sup>

On 17 January 2008, Ko Than Htay and Ko Zaw Naing staged an anti-regime demonstration from their bicycles on the streets of Taungup. They were arrested and severely tortured by Police Chief Win Aung Ni and Special Investigator Maung Than. A relative of one of the boys stated that the boys were unable to eat or drink properly following the torture and were unable sleep in their beds due to pain from the injuries sustained.<sup>105</sup>

50 Burmese soldiers from Buthidaung stole several tons of rice from traders on 18 January 2008 while the traders rode on the ferry from Sittwe to Buthidaung. The traders were accused of smuggling and their rice was thrown overboard while some soldiers looted the rice to sell on their own.<sup>106</sup>

Another NaTaLa village appeared in Maungdaw Township on 31 January 2008 when 250 NaTaLa villagers coming from 60 households arrived to live in houses built by Rohingya forced labour on land that was forcibly taken from them.<sup>107</sup>

On 12 February 2008, Mostafa Kamal, age 22, of Maungdaw Township was arrested by Bawli Bazaar police after they suspected that he had visited Bangladesh. He showed them a guest list of where he stayed in Maungdaw proving he had not in fact gone to Bangladesh. This did not satisfy police officer San Min who demanded 50,000 kyat for his release.

In further examples of the above mentioned '*cultural genocide*,' on 12 February 2008, a police man entered the central mosque in Maungdaw and proceeded to urinate into the water source from which worshippers receive ablution. The mosque committee did not take action as the authorities have repeatedly turned a deaf ear toward them in the past.<sup>108</sup>

On 23 February 2008, *Kaladan News* reported two cases of the authorities of Maungdaw township forcing people to pay tolls in order to retrieve the corpses of their relatives. Mohammed Amin, age 3, drowned while playing near a shrimp dam on 21 February 2008. The child's family had to pay 50,000 kyat and 11 bags of cement to the Bawli Bazaar police to get the body back in order to provide a proper burial. The total cost was 182,000 kyat. The second case occurred after Mohammed Noor, age 50, was killed by an elephant while cutting bushes in a forest on 20 February 2008. The family had to pay 50,000 kyat to the police and 20,000 kyat to the hospital doctor for not performing an autopsy (While technically not forbidden in Islam, autopsies are commonly frowned upon in many Muslim societies).<sup>109</sup>

On 24 February 2008, twelve Rohingya villagers from Thinn Baw Gwe (Kol Loon) village in Maungdaw Township were sentenced to seven years in Buthidaung jail for renovating a mosque and Hafez Khana. They acquired the necessary documents from the NaSaKa commander of area 8 but this commander was transferred and the incoming commander refused to acknowledge them. The names of the jailed were:

1. Hashim Ullah, age 40;
2. Rahamat Ullah, age 30;
3. Noor Mohamed, age 50;
4. Sayed Yllag, age 40;
5. Md. Rofique, age 40;
6. Nur Islam, age 50 and six others.<sup>110</sup>

Nasaka officials deceived Mohammed Yusuf, age 32, and six other Rohingya businessmen near the Naff River by Maungdaw Township on 8 March 2008. After the businessmen secured permission to cross the border to Bangladesh, the Nasaka seized their goods and boat, valued together at 40,000 kyat and then arrested them. The men were then imprisoned at Kunnapara Nasaka camp and released on 10 March after paying 800,000 kyat to the camp's commander. A village elder said, "*It is a ploy to destroy the business of the Rohingya community.*"<sup>111</sup>

On 21 March 2008, a scuffle between young Buddhist devotees and military authorities broke out at Lawkanaanda pagoda in Sittwe, causing violence and disorder to spread over the entire town and eventually leading to a 6 p.m. curfew. The curfew was also inexplicably imposed on the Rohingya sections of town. Authorities took advantage of the curfew and demanded food and money from homebound Rohingya families.<sup>112</sup>

On 8 June 2008, a cow was stolen from the hut of Jalil (not his real name), near Bawli Bazaar in Maungdaw township. Two days later the cow was seen at the local police station. When Jalil questioned the police about his cow they told him they had taken it from the robbers and he had to pay 150,000 kyat to get it back. Jalil chose not to pay as the police demanded more money than the cow was worth.<sup>113</sup>

A clear example of the effects of the SPDC's discrimination took place on 27 June 2008, when Burma's border security force in Maungdaw Township's area No.4 arrested Noor Khobir, age 22, and Mohammed Yousha, age 23, both Rohingya, and two NaTaLa girls

while attempting to flee to Bangladesh. They were released after paying 150,000 kyat to the NaSaKa and continued to Bangladesh. At the time of the report the Rohingya males had disappeared and the NaTaLa girls were stranded in Bangladesh. The couples decided to flee because their parents would not allow them to marry and the Rohingya men would likely be jailed for getting romantically involved with NaTaLa girls.<sup>114</sup>

On the night of 1 July 2008, in Nantha Daung village, Maungdaw Township, NaSaKa members armed with automatic weapons entered the home of Ahmed Rezaul Nuri, age 53 and confined his family in a room. They proceeded to rob the family of gold ornaments valued at 2 million kyat. When Nuri and his son Mohamed Siddique, age 15 attempted to resist they were severely beaten and knifed. Their injuries, while serious, were not fatal.<sup>115</sup>

On 7 July 2008, *Kaladan News* reported that in May, police and Ward Peace and Development Council (WPDC) authorities in Maungdaw Town extorted 600,000 from a Rohingya man on account of not registering with the local authorities. Ziaul Haque, age 20, went to visit his mother-in-law in Ward No.5 in Maungdaw Town. When he went to register with the WPC authorities at 8 pm he was told it was not necessary and that there was no problem. About an hour later however, he was arrested while eating at his mother-in-law's house. After suffering torture he was released on 600,000 kyat bail. A village elder claimed that it was illegal to check guest lists at 9 pm and that it was usually done after 11 pm.<sup>116</sup>

*Kaladan News* reported on 10 July 2008 that around 500 people were used as forced labour on the rain-damaged Buthidaung-Maungdaw Highway. Among the labourers were criminals from Buthidaung Prison, some of them awaiting charges and civilians from surrounding villages. Villagers who could not work received a fine of 2,000 kyat.<sup>117</sup> While construction on the road continued, the NaSaKa charged people 10,000 kyat each to take their motorcycles on the road, as cars could not pass.<sup>118</sup>

According to a *Kaladan News* report also from 10 July 2008, the District Peace and Development Council (DPDC) along with Town and Village Development Council members seized the graveyards in NaSaKa areas 6 and 7 of Maungdaw Township, Arakan State. They planned to build NaSaKa camps, pagodas and other structures on the graveyards.<sup>119</sup>

Asharaf Meah, of Aley Than Kyaw village in Maungdaw Township was arrested on 10 July 2008 and severely tortured by police forces. He was arrested because of his connection to an unnamed business man who stole from Noor Hussain, a Bangladeshi shrimp business owner. Hussain thought that if Meah was arrested he would get his money back so he approached the Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Maungdaw and got Meah arrested. Nyi Nyi Lwin Soe, the OC, is infamous for his treatment of Rohingyas and expecting a large bribe, allowed Meah to die. Meah's family claimed he had no connection to the stolen money and they had not received his body back from authorities at the time of the report.<sup>120</sup>

Starting on 15 July, the Burmese Navy began arresting fishermen at sea and forcing them to repair rain damage on Dayawaddi naval base in Kyaukpuru Town, Arakan State. Many of the fishermen had been at sea for three days and because of the forced labour, much of the fish they caught rotted in the sun.<sup>121</sup>

*Narinjara News* reported on 3 September 2008 that authorities in Sittwe were forcing citizens to act as sentries at night. While curbing crime is the official reason given for these requirements, many believed the increased security was due to the one year anniversary of the Saffron Revolution. U Maung Than Kyaw from *Rupa* (south) Ward was one of the ward councils who had been serving fines on those who could not provide sentry duty. Sometimes the duty lasted only three hours while at other times it lasted the whole night.<sup>122</sup>

Over 100 villagers from every village in the north part of Maungdaw Township were forced to work on road construction on 18 September 2008. The work began immediately after Western Command Commander Major General Thaung Aye visited to oversee the situation. Some of the labour consisted of hauling stones from the forest in order help pave the road.<sup>123</sup>

*Narinjara News* reported on 20 September 2008, that 105 Muslims from Sittwe, Arakan State were sentenced to six months in prison for attempting to travel to Rangoon without authorisation. The people, who were going to Rangoon to work, adorned their bus with Buddhist flags to make it look like they were on a pilgrimage. When they were arrested the authorities also took a reported 80.5 million kyat from them.<sup>124</sup>

It was reported on 10 October 2008 that the military junta in Burma agreed to lease 50,000 acres of farmland to Bangladesh. Most of the land came from Myauk Oo and Man Aung Island which the military owns, despite claims from villagers that it was forcibly procured. The leasing of this land will likely have dire food production related consequences for Arakan State's already deprived population.<sup>125</sup>

On the night of 30 October 2008 a religious ceremony in Maung Hna Ma village was raided by the NaSaKa. The owner of the house, Abu Subayan was arrested for holding illegal functions and was set to be brought to trial if his wife could not pay the NaSaKa 12 million kyat in bail money.<sup>126</sup>

In late October 2008 the director of the NaSaKa released a statement ordering all Rohingya Maulavi bridegrooms to be clean shaven before they would be given permission to marry. This was a change from the previous, though still discriminatory rule declaring that only those bridegrooms who were not religious leaders had to be clean shaven before being given permission to marry. On top of being clean shaven, Rohingyas attempting to marry had to pay a fee of at least 30,000 kyat to the authorities.<sup>127</sup>

On 4 November 2008, 13 members of the Myanmar Muslim Organisation (MMO) were given sentences varying between 3 months and 13 years. Those sentenced were:

1. Nir Ahmed;
2. Abdu Razak;
3. Maulana Obaid;
4. Mohammed Yakub;
5. Maunla Salay, from Zee Bin Khali Village;
6. Master Shamshu, a senior assistant teacher of Maungdaw High School;
7. Salim alias Than Tun, the Chairman of the Myanmar Muslim Council;
8. Dr Kamal alias Dr Hla Myint;
9. Dr Zahir alias Dr Zaw Nyint;
10. Akbal from Ward #2;
11. Dil Mohamed, the secretary of MMO from Bomo Para;
12. Noor Kodir; and
13. Ba Maung of Ward #5 of Maungdaw Town.

The men were arrested in Maungdaw Township under accusations of being involved in planning insurgent activities and sentenced for having an illegal office and holding meetings without permission. It should be noted that the MMO is a legal organisation.<sup>128</sup>

On 11 November 2008, some army officers from the LIB #379 began harassing women in Minbya. A fight broke out when local men took offense to this affront, resulting in more army officers arriving, brandishing bricks and bamboo sticks. An eyewitness stated:

*"They brought sticks with them. There were about 40 people in the car holding sticks and they carried out attacks throughout the town. They pointed their guns and ordered them not to do anything and to sit down and they beat them up."*<sup>129</sup>

Four youths were hospitalized before a crowd of nearly 100 citizens caused the soldiers to flee. One of the youths, Tun Aye Naing, was in critical condition. Because of the weight of the situation, the regional commander in chief was said to be handling the matter at the time and most of the soldiers were detained.<sup>130</sup>

The Military Operations Command (MOC) in charge of Kyauktaw, Minbya, Rathedaung, Ponnagyun and Mrauk U Townships ordered each Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) to issue slips allowing for the slaughter of cattle at the Eid Festival, spanning 9 to 11 December 2008. The TPDCs issued these slips on the condition that there would be 100 adults for each slaughtered cattle. Villagers also had to provide cattle purchasing slips and 50,000 kyat. The punishment for slaughtering cattle without a permission slip was three years in prison. The TPDCs were also required to compile lists of Rohingyas to be sent to the MOC.<sup>131</sup>

On 18 December 2008, nearly 200 acres of farm land in Kyauk Pru Township were seized by the Burmese Army leaving over 50 farmers landless. A villager speaking under condition of anonymity said,

*"We have not received any compensation from the Burmese Army for our lands. We are being oppressed by the army. We were forced to work at many road construction sites near the army headquarters as well as work in the construction sites of army buildings."*<sup>132</sup>



The charred remains of what was Hsaw Wah Der village in Toungoo District of northern Karen State after SPDC army soldiers razed it to the ground. Toungoo District is home to large numbers of IDPs who refuse to live under military control and instead choose a flight of uncertainty and flight in the forests where they are regarded as enemies of the State. [Photos: KHRG]

## Chin State

Chin State is situated in the western hills of Burma, bordering the northeastern states of India and is home to a population of approximately 500,000 people, with a further 50,000 Chin refugees are estimated to be living in Mizoram State, India. Approximately 90 percent of the Chin population is Christian, which has resulted in Chin being targeted for harsh discrimination along religious lines by the predominantly-Buddhist regime. (For more information, see Chapter 8: Freedom of Belief and Religion).

Chin state is one of the most isolated places in Burma and the villagers living there, mostly subsistence farmers, face massive food shortages on a regular basis. In 2008 these shortages were compounded by an invasion of rats. The invasion, known locally as *'maudam'*, occurs about every 50 years and even though the junta has had ample time to prepare for it, little has been done to ease the plight of the villagers where the plague occurred. The plague of rats is caused by the flowering of bamboo plants and the subsequent production of a fruit on which the rats feed. The rats reproduce rapidly and when the fruit is completely devoured they move on to the villager's rice and crops. The head of one village reported that the village had no food left and *"people in my village are going into the jungle to find wild vegetables, like leaves and roots to mix with a little rice. Our situation is desperate."*<sup>133</sup> The situation was truly desperate at the time of the report, as the Chin Human Rights Organisation recently reported that 20 percent of Chin State's population was in need of immediate food aid. As a result of the conditions, many Chin villages were emptying as villagers headed to India in an attempt to find food and safety.<sup>134</sup> According to Chin leaders, the SPDC had not delivered any aid and had severely impeded aid entering the region.<sup>135</sup> The Country Agency for Rural Development (CAD), a Roman-Catholic NGO in Rangoon reported that they were blocked from delivering food aid to nearly 1,000 villagers in one of the remotest parts of the already remote state.<sup>136</sup> Eventually in November the SPDC did deliver some supplies to fifteen villages near Cikha Township. The supplies for 3,000 people were carried by seven soldiers from LIB #50 and two horses. One villager reported that *"They provided one match box for each house, a bar of soap for three households, one packet of tobacco to each village, one tickle of dry fish for one village and one vest for each village."*<sup>137</sup>

The food crisis in Chin State has had effects beyond starvation. Skin diseases, cholera and diarrhea have become endemic in some areas and caused death; including the deaths of four villagers in Ngaphai village, Thangtlang Township.<sup>138</sup> Children stopped attending school because they had to forage in the jungle for edible roots and plants. The Joint-High School in Sabawngpi village in Matupi Township was forced to close indefinitely because students were not showing up.<sup>139</sup> Some elder villagers said they would rather commit suicide than see their children dying of starvation.<sup>140</sup>

On 9 February 2008, a retired police officer reported that police in Chin and Arakan state actively recruited underage youth for police service. If the constables did not reach a certain number of recruits their wages would be cut, so they turned to talking youths into joining. Regarding the situation, a local person said *"There are around 30 minors from my native town who have been forced to join the police force."*<sup>141</sup>

The regime placed a ban on celebrating Chin National Day, 20 February and required its name be changed to Chin Culture Day.<sup>142</sup> Despite the regime's restrictions nearly 10,000 people gathered at Lion City Hall in Rangoon to attend a supposed celebration for new university students. Unbeknownst to the regime, the colourful festival was a celebration of Chin nationality and included music, speeches and food.<sup>143</sup>

In May 2008 it was reported that villagers from the Matupi area had been terrorised by soldiers from Colonel Zaw Myint Oo's LIB #304 who were slaughtering their livestock en masse. According to one resident, the soldiers killed at least 8 mithuns (a bovine creature,

similar to a cow, indigenous to Southeast Asia), 15 pigs and a countless number of chickens. When villagers asked for compensation Oo responded by saying they could get paid for the animals when they could pay the army for the bullets used to kill them. In July, LIB #304 struck again with the slaughter of at least 15 pigs in the villages of Sabawngpi, Sabawngte, Lumang and Darling.<sup>144</sup>

On 3 May 2008, it was reported that the regime had decided to include some parts of Chin State into Sagaing Division. The boundary was to be demarcated by U Aung Myo Nyunt between 27 March and 4 April 2008. The villages to be added to Sagaing Division were said to be:

1. Khai Kam;
2. Mai Nuai;
3. Tan Zang;
4. Zo Zang;
5. Zo Nuam Zang;
6. Kim Lai; and
7. Dim Zang.

Most importantly, around 8,000 acres of farmland, teak forests and nickel and chromium mining areas would be added to Sagaing division through the new demarcation.<sup>145</sup>

In mid-July 2008, three villages in Paletwa Township were heavily fined for failing to provide labourers to the SPDC. Captain Khin Zaw of LIB #538 demanded workers from:

1. Pathiantlang;
2. Sin Oo Wa;
3. Shweletwa;
4. Ma Oo;
5. Sha Oo;
6. Para;
7. Ma Oo;
8. Paungmu; and
9. Kupi.

The forced labourers were to build an army base in Shinletwa village. The villages of Para, Pathiantlang and Sha Oo did not provide workers for the construction period of 13 to 19 July and were subsequently fined 80,000 kyat each.<sup>146</sup>

On 24 July 2008, three Chin hillside farmers were tortured after being accused of having connections to the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP). The victims, U Tha Aung, age 47, U Kyaw Zan, age 48, and U Ba Tun, age 50, all reside in Phone Yang Wa village of Kin Thalin village tract, Paletwa Township. After being tortured, the soldiers, members of Battalion #289 based in Paletwa, took them from their huts and proceeded to burn the huts to the ground.<sup>147</sup>

During the last week of July 2008, a widow from Satu village in Matupi Township had 30,000 kyat extorted from her by 17 soldiers from LIB #304. The woman owned two cows and the SPDC had recently implemented a new law requiring villagers to pay 30,000 kyat if they owned or sold cows.<sup>148</sup>

On 3 August 2008, Lieutenant Toe Ya and LIB #304 entered the village of Sabawngpi and demanded five porters and chickens. The village's headman U Maung Kyi fulfilled the requests the following day. The five porters carried military supplies 50 miles to Razua town.<sup>149</sup>

On 10 August 2008, Captain Khant Kyaw of LIB #304 came upon two women, Daw Si Si, age 66, and her 27 year old daughter in the jungle near the village of Lailenpi in Matupi Township. The captain ordered his soldiers on and, after they left demanded the women undress at gunpoint and attempted to rape them. When the women refused his advances he fired twice in the air, causing his troops to come back at which point the attempted rape ended. Upon hearing about the encounter, a local women's group questioned Kyaw. He denied it but when the women threatened to bring the case to court in Chin State's capital of Hakha he compensated them with 200,000 kyat.<sup>150</sup>

On 26 August 2008, it was reported that discriminatory practices were denying people from Thangtlang Township aid from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Clerks from the Township Peace and Development Council reportedly removed otherwise eligible people from the receiver lists and only included people who had provided the SPDC with free labour and those who had paid 'Physical Activities Fees' to their children's schools. Some of those removed from the list were orphans, widows and religious leaders. The UNDP initially wanted to provide 10,000 kyat in aid food aid to each home in Thangtlang but the distribution was delayed due to the above mentioned situation.<sup>151</sup>



Internally displaced Karen villagers wading across a river in Papun District, Karen State as they attempt to flee from an advancing SPDC army patrol in April 2008. Villagers who live beyond State control as IDPs must be prepared to flee at a moments notice from SPDC army soldiers who hunt them. [Photo: © KHRG]

On 23 September 2008, the corpse of Corporal Thant Lwin from LIB #87 was found near Hmawngkawn village. His rifle and ammunition were missing. The SPDC soon began a search of the area, hunting the missing gun and the killer. The search ran from September 25 to September 27 and 40 people from Doih Khen village, 60 people from Hmawngkawn A & B villages, and another 47 people from Leilet village were forced to participate. At the time of the report the gun had yet to be found and the SPDC's search campaign forced some local people to flee to Mizoram in India.<sup>152</sup>

During the month of October 2008, the Town Peace and Development Council (TPDC) in Matupi forced civilians into hard labour on 70 acres of state-owned tea plantations. The civilians were forced to work in rotation every 3 days and those who could not were fined 3,000 kyat.<sup>153</sup>

In November 2008, the Forest Department of the SPDC began forcing each of Chin State's households to pay a tax in order to cut and collect wood and farm. The Forest department was taking advantage of Chin State's state of famine and the beginning of the farming season. 500 kyat was taken as land and revenue tax while an additional 500 kyat was taken as a wood cutting tax, accounting for 1,000 kyat in taxes.<sup>154</sup>

On 18 November 2008, Kam Lat Khoat, the son of Chin Sian Thang, a prominent Chin activist, and Thang's nephew Kai Kham Kwal were sentenced to 33 years and eight years in prison, respectively. A monk and an Arakan activist were also sentenced. The sentencing followed on the heels of a crackdown on activists. Five experts from the United Nations issued a statement condemning the junta's harassment of people exercising their human rights and called for the release of all detainees and their defense counsels and open, fair trials. Thang himself responded by saying *"The judicial system in Myanmar has collapsed and the courts are passing down sentences in contravention of the law. These secret trials are blatant violations of human rights."*<sup>155</sup>

On 11 December 2008, LIB #550 Captain Chaw Wa declared that citizens from the nine territories of Sinletwa, Paletwa Township, as well as their 30 villages, would be required to partake in a football tournament running from 14 December to 18 December. He also said that those who refused to participate would be fined 80,000 kyat. Villagers struggling to survive the famine were not sure as to why the soldiers were holding the match. The nine territories were:

1. Para;
2. San U;
3. Pathian Tlang;
4. Ma Oo;
5. Sin Oo wa;
6. Kung Pin;
7. Wa Yung;
8. Sinletwa; and
9. Shwe Letwa<sup>156</sup>

## Kachin State

Kachin State, located in the far north of the country is believed to be home to approximately 1.2 million people. The majority of the Kachin population is Christian and thus the majority of the SPDC's persecution of the ethnic Kachin has mainly focused on their religion and on their conversion to Buddhism. (For more information, see Chapter 12: Freedom of Belief and Religion).

An article published on 10 March 2008 by the Kachin News Group (KNG) reported that the USDA forced teachers in Myitkyina to support the approval of the constitution at the referendum. A teacher was quoted as saying;

*"We have no choice as we have received the paper in our school. We have to write our names in the list for the ensuing referendum and all school teachers have to fill in their names pledging support for the referendum."*<sup>157</sup>

On 8 July 2008 the Karen News Group (KNG) reported that, before being transferred in June 2008, Major General Ohn Myint destroyed all of the documents pertaining to his time as Kachin State Commander. The documents, many of which related to finance matters, were destroyed by the Kachin State Peace and Development Council staff as Myint's men watched. Myint ruled Kachin State from mid-2005 to June 2008. He was best known for

pressuring the KIO into a moderate stance and into support for the referendum regarding the country's new constitution. He was promoted to the position of Commander of No.1 Bureau of Special Operations.<sup>158</sup>

The KNG reported on 10 July 2008 that the junta confiscated land from Christians in the Sadung area. U Kyaw Tu of the Sadung Township Peace and Development Council ordered the land be taken from Christian leaders even though the area already had a Christian boarding house that housed 50 students a year and had been in operation for almost ten years. It should be noted that the area was also administered by the KIO and NDA-K.<sup>159</sup> The KNG also reported on 12 July 2008 that IB #137 seized 50 acres of land without compensation in Machyang Bow, a small city on the Mali River in Putao district. The seized land included the popular Stone Dragon or 'Chyauk Naga'.<sup>160</sup>

On 27 July 2008, Nhkum Hkawn Din, a 15 year old school girl from Nam Sai Village, Bamaw District, was gang-raped and murdered on her way to deliver rice to her brother at work. When they realized she was missing, her family began their search and at 9 pm reported her missing. The subsequent search lasted for three days until her naked and mutilated body was found near a Burmese military checkpoint. The Burma Campaign UK described the state of her corpse as having a skull crushed beyond recognition, multiple stab wounds, facial features completely destroyed, throat cut, and showing signs of violation with knives.<sup>161</sup>

After an autopsy, it became clear that there were between two and three attackers but the authorities claimed the evidence was insufficient to track them down. Local people reported seeing two soldiers LIB #437 following her as well as two soldiers returning from the crime scene. After intense local pressure one of the three accused was taken into police custody and on 17 August, military, police and town officials gave the family rice, sugar, cooking oil, condensed milk and a half million kyat. Since then no further action has been taken.<sup>162</sup> Protests were held in front of Burmese embassies in Japan, India, Thailand, Malaysia, the United Kingdom and Denmark.<sup>163</sup> The Women's League of Burma have called for the junta's leaders to be tried at the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity as the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1820 on 19 June 2008. The resolution stated that rape and sexual violence can be considered crimes against humanity.<sup>164</sup>

It was reported on 2 September 2008, that #1 Police Station in Myitkyina began searching hotels for unregistered overnight guests. The police generally targeted hotels that catered to prostitution but as a source close to the police told the KNG:

*"From the hotels the police are arresting guests whether they are prostitutes or not and are taking them away to the police station. They are being charged and detained for a night in the police station. If they are not prostitutes, they are release later."*<sup>165</sup>

On 12 September 2008 the KNG reported that the authorities in Myitkyina were demanding increased taxes while failing to provide services. Shop owners in the municipal areas complained that though the authorities collected taxes for garbage collection, the authorities had failed to collect in their areas. Shop owners in Tatfone quarter said that the Municipal Office never arranged for the regular garbage collection in their quarter as well as other downtown quarters while the military base and the areas around the Township Clock Tower got regular collection. Stores are taxed between 20,000 and 90,000 kyat a year while tea shops are taxed 20,000 kyat a month.<sup>166</sup>

The Naypyidaw regime placed a curfew on Myitkyina following a rash of students pasting anti-regime posters around the city. The curfew, which began on 18 September 2008 and came into effect at 10 PM, led to panic among the city's population, as some people were fined or arrested even before the curfew came into effect. The fines averaged about 10,000 kyat while the police were offering a 100,000 kyat reward for information about the identity of the student activists.<sup>167</sup>

A village chairman from Narlone village, Momauk Township was beaten by SPDC soldiers on 14 October 2008. Brang Aung, age 40, was searching for Phadut Naw, an expelled KIO soldier when he came to LIB #105's checkpoint near Laiza. They questioned him and accused him of being a KIO recruiter and beat him. A relative said:

*"Two of his upper teeth and two lower teeth were loosened. His lips were swollen. He can't hear anymore. His chest was stamped on. His neck was jammed and they shoved a gun in his mouth. He is at home now, but he hasn't been able to eat for two days. Last night, he was taken away again."*<sup>168</sup>

On 2 December 2008, *Mizzima* reported that the Burmese military regime had begun work on a small hydro-electric dam on the Chiphwi river, northeast of Myitkyina. The project was lead by China Power Investment Corporation (CPIC) and was expected to produce around 980 kilowatts of electricity to be used to power the construction of dams on the Nmai Hka (May Kha) and Mali Hka Rivers. Groups like the Kachin Development Network Group (KDNG) protested against these dams as they were not likely to benefit the nearby communities. KDNG reported that the projects would destroy over 47 villages and threaten over 10,000 lives as 766 square kilometers of farmland would be flooded.<sup>169</sup>

## Karen State

In late-November 2005, the SPDC launched its largest military offensive against the Karen since the massive offensive in 1997. These attacks have remained somewhat sustained since they began and continued into 2008.

Despite claims made by the SPDC to the effect that the offensive is aimed at wiping out the armed resistance of the KNU, the vast majority of the violence has been directed at civilian villages. Most of the villages bearing the brunt of these attacks are concentrated in the three northern Karen districts of Toungoo, Nyaunglebin, and Papun.

SPDC army soldiers have directly and deliberately attacked unarmed and undefended villages, firing upon civilians, shooting at farmers in their fields and shelling whole villages without warning. Most villagers flee their villages whenever SPDC army soldiers draw near and return only after the soldiers have moved on. After the troops leave, the villagers return to harvest their crops and reoccupy their homes if they have not been destroyed. When soldiers burn the village they leave no home for villagers to return to. Similarly, when soldiers burn the fields, they leave no crops to harvest. In addition, they often leave numerous landmines in the village in a deliberate attempt to target those who would return to their homes and fields.

Patterns of mine use by the SPDC have indicated that the mines are being deployed to deliberately target the civilian population and not the armed combatants of the KNLA. Mines have been laid in villages, along paths to and from the villagers' fields, in their fields and in other areas such as along the banks of rivers where villagers are likely to frequent. The presence of landmines in Karen State is a very real threat and fear of those mines dramatically restricts the movement of villagers, which can be particularly detrimental when

farmers are afraid to travel to their fields or to local markets. The Thai-Burma border is also reportedly extensively mined to prevent or deter the flight of refugees. (For more information, see Chapter 4: Landmines and Other Explosive Devices).

The SPDC has attempted to use this offensive to consolidate its control across northern Karen State where its grip has always been tenuous. The military strategy appears to be that all those living in areas beyond SPDC army control are to be forcibly relocated into areas where the military can maintain a presence. Meanwhile, all of those who refuse to comply are shot. During 2007, SPDC army units constructed several new army camps throughout the offensive area, many of which were built with the forced labour of local communities. Once these camps were established, the soldiers launched patrols from them and fired indiscriminately, effectively turning these areas into free fire zones.

Since early 2006, many villages located in areas newly controlled by the SPDC have been forcibly relocated. Often troops arrive in a given village and give the residents a few days to pack their belongings and move to a designated site. At other times, no advance warning is given at all, and villages must relocate immediately, carrying only what they can carry on their backs. If they are seen in the area after the deadline to move, they are told they will be shot. Once they have been herded into camps, villagers are constantly watched by SPDC army troops and all aspects of their lives are strictly controlled. Relocation sites are often fenced and villagers are not allowed to leave the area. Moreover, the sites are typically grossly overcrowded and very little (if any) arable land is left available to the new arrivals. (For more information, see Chapter 16: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation). Villagers are also often used as forced labour and are regularly the targets of extortion from soldiers.

Those who refuse to live under the SPDC and instead choose to live beyond State control in the forests of Karen State face considerable hardship as they attempt to remain hidden. Life in the jungle is especially difficult without permanent shelter during the monsoon season. Movement for the internally displaced, living in the forest, is often restricted by the movement of SPDC troops in the area, the location of SPDC camps, roadways, and landmines. However, most IDPs can manage to remain hidden from the SPDC army patrols that hunt them, either by moving regularly or by moving deeper into the forest, further away from areas where the SPDC can maintain a presence. However these areas continued to decrease throughout 2008 as the SPDC expanded its sphere of control in the region.



Examples of SPDC ordinance employed against unarmed civilian villagers in Karen State. This photograph shows a defective Burmese-made 60 mm mortar that was fired at an IDP hiding site during 2008. Similarly, these captured Burmese-made copies of the M-14 antipersonnel blast mines have been deployed throughout Karen State and other parts of the country in their thousands. [Photo: © KHRG]

Perhaps the most pervasive effect of the offensive in northern Karen State has been the decreasing availability of food. This can be said to be true both for those living in SPDC controlled villages and relocation sites as well as for those living in hiding in the forests. Several elements of the military campaign contribute to the problem of food scarcity in Karen State and all of these elements combine to force people from their homes in hunger. Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, SPDC army units have burned large numbers of agricultural fields, plantations and farmlands, with the purpose of deliberately ruining that season's crop. The proliferation of new army camps, in addition to the deployment of landmines and the regular SPDC army patrols have prevented farmers from preparing, sowing or harvesting their fields. Secondly, SPDC soldiers have also looted and burned many villages and homes, along with all possessions and food that they had contained. (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood).

According to a recent report by the Free Burma Rangers (FBR), a humanitarian aid organisation working in the conflict zones of eastern Burma, *"much of the population of northern Karen State is now displaced. For those remaining, continual attacks, patrols, and the close proximity of new Burma Army camps has made returning to villages and fields impossible."*<sup>170</sup> FBR also said in the same report that Karen civilians are asking the international community for help, saying: *"If the Burma Army is not stopped, or we do not get help, when you come to Karen State in the future, there will no longer be Karen people. Please tell the rest of the world to help us."*<sup>171</sup>

On 1 January 2008, soldiers from LIB #704 shot and killed Saw Bo La Gyi, age 53, and wounded Saw Bo Wa, age 32, in Yaw Kee village in Nyaunglebin District. Yaw Kee has been under regular attack from the SPDC, the most devastating of which occurred in October 2007 when it was mortared and leveled. As with the aforementioned situation on 1 January, the military's 'shoot on sight' policy led to troops from IB #231 killing Maung Ga Shwey, the headman of Na Shwe Mo village, in Dooplaya District, central Karen State on 24 January.<sup>172</sup>

On 11 January 2008 at a meeting organized by SPDC LIB #339 commander Naing Win in Thay Maw Gkoo village, villagers were informed that the ten SPDC teachers in Thay Maw Gkoo and Wa Mee Gkla village tracts in Dta Greh Township would receive their salaries not from the SPDC, but from the students. 14 primary schools were required to pay the salaries. They were as follows:

1. Thay Maw Gkoo;
2. Gkeh Dteh;
3. Gk'Noh Hta;
4. Gon M'Nee;
5. Gkyaw Gkay Hta;
6. Waw Gkyaw;
7. Wa Mee Gkla;
8. Htee Gk'Haw;
9. Sih Po Kee;
10. Meh La Ah;
11. Meh La Ah Hta;
12. Bpwoh Bpwah Lay;
13. Gklay Po Gklo; and
14. Gklay Moh Kee.

At these schools, each student was forced to pay 20 Thai baht to cover the teacher's salaries on top of any travel costs the teachers might have incurred. These fees were in addition to the usual school fees. Because of the high cost of SPDC schools and the ban on teaching the Karen language, many parents send their children to Thailand or IDP camps to finish their education.<sup>173</sup>

On 28 January 2008 troops from MOC #21 shot and killed 23 year old Saw Day Kreh Mu of Thay Nwey Kee. The murder took place as the man and his friend were walking through the jungle near P'na Mo Keh in the Muthey area of Nyaunglebin District. His friend escaped unscathed.<sup>174</sup>

Beginning on 29 January 2008, Commander Yay Moo of IB #96 and Maung Doo of the Special People's Militia (*Ahtoo Pyithusit*) ordered villagers to escort SPDC soldiers along the road from Dt'Gkwee Bpoo to Bpaw Baw Htah villages. In one incident on 1 February, twenty villagers each from the following villages were forced to serve as escorts:

1. Bpaw Paw Bpoo;
2. Htee Nuh Bpoo;
3. Noh Lah Kee;
4. Theh Kaw Htah;
5. Bpoh Gklaw Law;
6. Bpee Dtee Kee;
7. Bpaw Baw Htah; and
8. Wah May Koh villages.<sup>175</sup>

On 13 February 2008, SPDC MOC #19, LIB #587 battalion deputy commander Myint Win entered Kyo Weh village and opened fire on villagers attempting to flee. He then searched people's homes, looting 29,000 kyat, one knife, two sarongs, a pair of trousers and one shirt from the house of Naw Moo Ner.<sup>176</sup>

On 10 May 2008, SPDC troops launched an assault on Mu Li Khi village, Karen State, destroying 11 houses and stealing food and supplies and forcing villagers to flee to safety.<sup>177</sup>

On 20 May 2008, soldiers from the Gkaw Thay Der based LIB #370 arrested Saw Gkaw Gkoh, age 40, from Ya Thay Gkoh village, Toungoo District. Gkoh was traveling to his plantation when the soldiers stopped him and sent him to a nearby camp. There SPDC officers Tu Win and Min Zaw ordered him to be executed.<sup>178</sup>

42-year-old Saw Koh Koh of Gklay Kee village, Toungoo District was arrested by soldiers from MOC #21 on 22 May 2008. Soon after the arrest and for no apparent reason they executed him.<sup>179</sup>

On 27 May 2008, more than 500 villagers from Karen State's Mon Township fled to the jungle after being attacked by SPDC forces. The FBR reported that the SPDC demanded 2,150,000 kyat (US \$1,900) from the villages of Lay Tain Daw, Tee Dto Lo, Aung Chan Tha, Paw Bpi Der and Myaung Oo. The money was supposedly meant to be aid for Cyclone Nargis victims.<sup>180</sup>

On 4 June 2008, the FBR reported that more than 1,000 people from Papun District fled to the jungle after IB #240 entered Te Mu Der village and destroyed homes, barns, farms and damaged a church. Similarly LIB #429 and LIB #531 entered Bwa Doh village, also in Papun District and began to beat and attack villagers. One man was seriously wounded and three rice barns were torched after SPDC troops launched mortars into the town.<sup>181</sup>

On 11 October 2008, Captain Tin Myint from LIB #3 demanded villagers and ox carts for building a bridge. The demands were for 15 people and 3 ox carts from each of the listed Thaton Township villages:

1. Mi Chaung Ai;
2. Htee Nya Pau;
3. Ma Yan Gone; and
4. Ka Law Ker.

On 16 October 2008, Tin Myint forced 30 villagers from each of the villages listed below into unpaid labour:

1. Mi Chaung Ai;
2. Htee Nya Pau;
3. Ma Yan Gone;
4. Shwe Yaung Pya; and
5. Ka Law Ker.<sup>182</sup>

## Karenni State

Karenni State, located in the east of the country, is home to a number of armed ethnic groups, both those allied with and those opposing the military regime, and has also been the site of some of the country's most intensive military offensives and human rights abuses. Unfortunately, little information regarding the human rights situation in Karenni State is made public, yet this by no means should be taken to indicate that Karenni State is free of such abuses. The lack of information, rather reflects both that relatively few organisations are actively working to document these abuses and also that the media has tended to shy away from this little known area in favour of neighbouring Karen State where literally dozens of groups are working to document human rights abuses. There are currently about 13,600 Karenni refugees living in Karenni Camp No.1 in Thailand's Mae Hong Son region. On 15 September 2008, 6,383 students, 497 staff members and 166 medical staff members and examiners were interviewed by the UNHCR to resettle in third countries. More than 20,000 Karenni have fled Burma in the past 20 years.<sup>183</sup>

On 14 February 2008 in Dawkalawlae village, ten soldiers, two of them officers, a company commander and a platoon from LIB #336 argued with Bu Reh, age 30. When Bu Reh became scared and attempted to run away the company commander gunned him down, killing him on the spot. The killer's name was unknown at the time of writing.<sup>184</sup>

On the evening of 10 May 2008, TPDC chairmen contacted and threatened village heads from Phruso, Shadaw, and Loikaw townships because people in their villages had cast 'No' votes in the referendum conducted earlier that day. Troops from LIB #428 visited the villages of Kaylyar and Htaybyarnyi to personally investigate why 'No' votes were cast.<sup>185</sup>

The *Kantawaddy Times* reported on 20 August 2008 that soldiers from LIB #427 forced villagers in Dawkalawdu Township to guard electricity transmission towers run by the Lawpita Hydroelectrical power company. The forced labourers came from the following villages:

1. Tanelarlare village;
2. Dawtere village;
3. Dawpawdu village;
4. Dawtangue village;
5. Dawwaremowt village;
6. Dawtami village; and
7. Nanhuhtwy village;

The villagers were forced to guard two towers per village with two guards per tower over 24 hours. They were threatened with fines and arrest if they failed to show up for guard duty. Khu Gai of the Karenni Social Welfare and Development Center (KSWDC) said that the guard duty was called for due to security concerns. Formerly, the SPDC had buried mines under the towers but as the mines may have outlived their use-by dates, the authorities were scared insurgent groups would take advantage of the situation and destroy the electricity towers, effectively damaging electricity flow to Rangoon and Mandalay. The guard duty began on 14 August 2008, following a joint KNU-KNPP staged blast on 30 July 2008, which damaged a tower near Lateto village.<sup>186</sup>

The *Kantawaddy Times* issued a report by Karenni Ever Green (KEG), an environmental organization, on 2 November 2008. The report stated that the SPDC's four cuts policy was creating more IDPs as well as specifically targeting them. KEG's team leader, Khu Ngey Reh, said *"Burmese troops set the places especially where IDPs are living as Free Fire Zones. If they see IDPs they can shoot and kill them because it is Free Fire Zone. And they are commanded to shoot."*<sup>187</sup>

## Mon State

The New Mon State Party (NMSP), the strongest Mon opposition group, signed a ceasefire deal with the regime in 1995, after which the Mon people had expected peace and development from the military regime. However, the progress that many had anticipated never came. Instead, human rights violations have continued over the years since, including the widespread confiscation of civilian lands. As a result, many Mon farmers became so impoverished that they fled the country rather than face starvation. The mass exodus of the Mon allowed for the broad resettlement of the area by ethnic Burmans, drawn to the area by economic opportunities and the availability of land, which over time has diluted the ethnic composition of the area so that the Mon are no longer the demographic majority in Mon State. The regime's strategy in the area actively discriminates against the Mon, impoverishing them and causing them to flee the country, only to be replaced with more ethnic Burmans who the SPDC entices to the area with generous financial incentives. The population transfer has taken place quite rapidly and has many local community groups worried about the preservation of the traditional way of life for the Mon in the face of the increased Burmanisation of their traditional homeland.<sup>188</sup>

In an apparent attempt to further weaken the Mon culture, the SPDC has decreed that the teaching of the native Mon language is forbidden in Mon State. During 2006, a senior SPDC official from Kyaik Mayaw Township said that *"Teaching the Mon language is a barrier to national development and solidarity. The SPDC will not achieve its objective of rural development in the area because of the Mon language teaching."*<sup>189</sup>

More blows were dealt to the Mon culture in 2008, when Mon language classes were cut from state schools in Thaton District. The elimination of the classes was set to affect some 3,000 pupils in 30 schools in Thaton District. The cuts were due to lack of attendance, caused by the implementation of extracurricular tuition, leaving the students too busy to study. Other teachers in Mon State were fearful their districts would face similar cuts.<sup>190</sup> This followed an announcement in February declaring that members of the ethnic Mon Literature and Culture Association (MLC) were to be replaced by members of the SPDC backed Union and Solidarity Development Association (USDA). Members of the MLC feared that USDA members would teach the Mon summer classes, using them as tools of cultural assimilation.<sup>191</sup> February proved to be a particularly dark month for Mon culture as the "Mon Cultural Museum" in Moulmein was forced to change its name to "Literature and Cultural Museum of the Burmese Cultural Ministry." This was followed by many of the most important Mon documents being taken from display and the statues in front of the building being painted so as not to appear in traditional Mon clothes.<sup>192</sup> Finally, authorities in Mon state prohibited students from participating in Mon National Day by scheduling final academic exams on 22 February, Mon National Day itself.<sup>193</sup>

SPDC abuses of the Mon people in 2008 were not limited to assaults on culture. In February 2008 the Independent Mon News Association (IMNA) reported that the Burmese junta began taking land from Mon villagers in Mudon Township. While this practice is common in neighboring Ye Township it is not in Mudon Township. Aung-Min, a farmer from Doe-mar village, Mudon Township reported that the army put up signs on his property claiming they owned it. Over a hundred other farmers also found these signs on their land, which they subsequently lost.<sup>194</sup>

On 4 April 2008, Nai Apain and Nai Balai were forced from their homes in the village of Jueplut near Three Pagodas Pass. The homes were accused of being too close to Jueplut Primary School and their inhabitants too loud. The value of the homes was believed to be around 30,000 and 100,000 Thai baht. Neither man had been compensated at the time of the report nor did it not seem likely that they would be in the future.<sup>195</sup>

On 20 May 2008, the SPDC beat a retired NMSP medic to death. The victim, 35 year old Nai Show, was arrested by IB #31 after being accused of planting bombs near a polling station in Khawzar Sub-Township and distributing fliers urging people to vote against the constitution. Under torture, Nai Show admitted to distributing the fliers but denied being involved in the bombing. It was later revealed by Khawzar police that the bombs were planted by local army officers in an attempt to frame Mon activists.<sup>196</sup>

IMNA reported on 16 June 2008 that IB #299 based in Ko-mile village, Ye Township issued an order prohibiting villagers from Ko-mile and Marn Ong from working on their farms. According to some villagers, the soldiers were using this opportunity to make a profit by demanding money from the villagers for travel permits.<sup>197</sup>

On 15 August 2008, IMNA reported that an SPDC Battalion commander sold a rubber plantation in Ah-Bit village, southern Mudon Township without the consent of the plantation's owner. The plantation was sold for 7 million kyat to a man who didn't live near the village. According to a local source, the battalion commander said he was ready to sell more plantations if people were willing to buy them.<sup>198</sup>

On 7 November 2008, Artillery Battalion (AB) #318 seized 120 acres of land from at least seven plantation owners in the villages of Ah-bit, Set-thawe, Doe-Mar and Yaung Doung villages in Mudon Township. The owners of the plantations, listed below, also lost their travel permission permits and the right to visit their land.

1. Nai A Shwe;
2. Nai A Mon;
3. Nai Halae;
4. Nai Thant;
5. Nai Balie;
6. Nai Zaw Lat; and
7. Nai Pan Shein.<sup>199</sup>

SPDC army soldiers from LIB #299 reported killed three rebels and one civilian in a clash near Man-aung village in southern Ye Township on 17 November 2008. A villager from nearby Koe Mine village confirmed the civilian was Nai a Saing who had been taken as a porter by the rebels.<sup>200</sup>

At midnight on the evening of 21 November 2008, LIB #3, acting under the leadership of Lieutenant Han Win Kyaw entered the village of Yin Ye and arrested six villagers. The men were interrogated and tortured over information regarding payment to rebel groups in the area. The soldiers reportedly held a flaming torch under the arms and legs of one man until he relinquished the information. When all of the information proved consistent they were released. The following day SPDC troops returned to the village and arrested seven more villagers, three of them women. One of the men was reportedly beaten when he stuttered while being questioned.<sup>201</sup>

## Shan State

On 4 January 2008 about 15 SPDC troops from IB #287 entered Murng Lerm Village, Murng Nawng tract in Kae See Township. They arrested 3 Lahu men over the age of 40 and took them out of the village where they interrogated them about the location of SSA-S soldiers in the area. The men denied seeing the troops and were brutally beaten. The interrogation culminated when the soldiers shot and killed one of the men and released the other two. Although the village reported the situation to military authorities in the area, as of February nothing had been done.<sup>202</sup>

While returning home from selling her goods on 13 January 2008, Naang Kam Wa (not her real name), encountered a patrol of 12 SPDC soldiers from LIB #528. After telling the troops she had nothing to sell them they became angry and Sergeant Tin Aye told her he was going to question her. After ordering his troops away he proceeded to rape her. After he finished sexually assaulting the woman, he accused her of selling her products to opium farmers and demanded that she pay a fine.<sup>203</sup>

On 14 February 2008, IB #30 soldiers under the command of deputy commander Thant Aung Zin forced residents of the following villages in Than Daung Township, Toungoo District, to expand a section of road;

1. Sauk Tha Kauk, 10 villagers;
2. Kler Muh Kee, 15 villagers;
3. Lah Meh Poh Lee, 25 villagers;
4. Tha Bah Rah, 20 villagers; and
5. Haw Thaw Bplo, 25 villagers.<sup>204</sup>

From early March 2008 onwards, the SPDC forced villagers from around the town of Nam-Zarng to provide labour for the construction of fences on IB #66's airfield. The villagers were forced to work in rotations and had to either cut bamboo or haul the cut bamboo with tractors. According to villagers from Wan Hai, every person from each family had to work four times per month as well as provide 2,500 kyat each time to cover the cost of tractor fuel. Those who did not work were fined an additional 2,000 kyat. As of July 2008 the construction had yet to be completed.<sup>205</sup>

Early in the morning on 7 April 2008, a group of 20 SPDC troops entered Nawng Wawn village in Hopong Township and at random, seized 20 villagers to be used as unpaid porters. The troops forced the porters to carry their ammunition, rice and other food stuffs. The portering lasted for a week and it was particularly difficult for 40 year old Mu-Lin. Mu-Lin was suffering from a terrible fever when he was taken and though he pleaded with the troops; his pleas fell on deaf ears. By the time he returned home he was completely exhausted. Unfortunately a Pa-O group had begun taking porters in the area so Mu-Lin and his family decided to flee for the Thai border. The journey proved too much for him and he succumbed to exhaustion and died in Naa Kawng Mu village in Mong-Ton Township, near the Thai border.<sup>206</sup>

These displays of forced portering were not limited to men. On 2 June 2008, as farmers in Mong Pan township were returning to their farms to work, they were warned by their wives that the SPDC was nearby and looking for porters. The men went into hiding, thinking that the SPDC would not take women as porters. Upon finding no men, LIB #223 demanded the women, Naang Zaw and Naang Nguay, both aged 38, and three others to come with them. For three days the women carried the soldier's pots, pans and food through the jungle, searching for Shan soldiers. They were not given proper rest nor were they allowed to wash themselves. After it became clear that the search was fruitless, the women were released at a nearby farm.<sup>207</sup>

On the evening of 11 May 2008 a sergeant and 2 soldiers from LIB #385 were shot at while they were stealing vegetables from a garden in Hophai. The sergeant was hit in the chest and died; the other two were unscathed. The farm owner Sai Ni, age 45, his wife Nang Poi, age 30 and their son Sai Kham, age 18, were all arrested and severely beaten by the authorities. The members of the group claimed that they did not know who had shot at the soldiers. On 14 May 2008, Nang Poi and Sai Kham were released and two days later all of the farmers in the area were arrested and sent to LIB #520's command post. The detained villagers included Long Keng village headman Zarm Hsa, Sai Nu, Sai Kham, Ai Di, Ai Kya and Zingna. They were all tortured daily and later released to LIB #332. Sai Ni, Sai Kham and Ai Di aged 46, were not seen when their families brought them food on 7 June 2008. The guards told the family that the men had already eaten which, according to a relative "...means they [authorities] have already killed them if they can't show us."<sup>208</sup>



An SPDC propaganda brochure discussing peace that was left behind by SPDC army soldiers in Mae Li Ki village of Karen State after they had burned the village to the ground. "Peace" as far as the SPDC is concerned has less to do with dignity and freedom, than it does about submission to the will of the military. [Photo: © FBR]

On 24 May 2008, 21 year old Naang Mawn (not her real name) was returning from working in the field to eat lunch at her home in Nam Mawn village, in Nawng Saang village tract, Kun-Hing Township when she came across a patrol of about 13 troops from SPDC IB #246. They stopped her and asked her where she was going. After telling them, they took her to a remote place not far from her village where nearly all of them gang raped her.<sup>209</sup>

On 3 July 2008, a 22 man patrol from Kholam based LIB #66, led by Lieutenant Aung Chan Tha, captured villagers from Nayang, Wan Phai village tract, and questioned them about the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) and whether it was operating in the area. When the villagers denied seeing members of the SSA-S, villagers Long Hsu, aged 60, Sai Lern Hsai, aged 18, and Sai Doo, aged 18, were beaten personally by Lieutenant Aung Chan Tha.<sup>210</sup>

In an article published in December 2008, Ailong Khammwe, chairman of the the Lahu Democratic Front (LDF), an ethnic army operating in Shan State accused the SPDC of forcing villagers to harvest poppy and then collecting taxes from them in Mong Hsat and Mong Ton in eastern Shan State.<sup>211</sup>

## 18.4 Abuse of Ethnic Minorities by Armed Ethnic Groups

Many ceasefire groups in Burma are also guilty of committing human rights abuses against, not only members of other ethnic minorities who live within their territories, but also against their own people; the same people that they claim to represent and protect. In signing a ceasefire pact with the regime, many groups have come to function as proxy armies of the SPDC. In return for “peace” and local autonomy, certain business concessions and material support, some ceasefire groups have aided the SPDC in their efforts to control the local population. Some of these groups have even fought alongside the SPDC during military offensives against resistance groups or local populations. By supporting the SPDC through militarization and oppression, ceasefire groups are able to expand their own zones of political and military control, and ultimately, villagers must fear not only the SPDC but the ceasefire groups as well.

### Arakan Liberation Party (ALP)

On the night of 17 November 2008, members of the ALP murdered three tribesmen, two of which were village headmen in the Bandarban district of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. The victims Pan Tun Aung, aged 46, of Singapa Mouza, Rwe Nong Mro, aged 35, of Mra Wa Village and Chong Doi Mro, aged 50, of the same village, were presumed to have been killed as revenge for helping government forces after the kidnapping of an NGO official. ALP leader Ran Naing Aung was seen at the murder of Pan Tun Aung.<sup>212</sup>

### Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)

On the night of 15 July 2008, DKBA deputy battalion commander Thaw M’Nah reportedly ordered his soldiers to wear KNLA uniforms and travel to an unnamed village in Thaton District where they demanded 500,000 kyat from the local village head. The village head resisted until the intimidation proved to be too much and he relented and gave 300,000 kyat to the soldiers.<sup>213</sup>

On 30 July 2008, a man identified only as Saw B--- aged 60, of B--- village, Thaton District, went to purchase an ox. He was stopped by DKBA soldiers at Htee Gkyoo Gkyo and interrogated by a DKBA soldier named Saw So leh. During the interrogation Saw Soh Leh discovered Saw B---’s ox money and accused him of bringing the money to the KNU. Saw B--- attempted to explain himself but was beaten with rifles, kicked and then robbed of the 125,000 kyat with which he was going to buy the ox.<sup>214</sup>

In August 2008, DKBA Brigade #999 Special Battalion officers Poe Gkay and Boh Gk’Doh instituted a lottery system for villagers in T’Nay Hsah Township, Pa’an District to be conscripted to the DKBA. In the lottery, villagers picked pieces of paper from a box and those who picked a piece with a checkmark were automatically forced into the DKBA for a year and a half. Most village tracts were required to provide 15 recruits, though larger tracts like Htee Wa Blaw had to send 25 villagers. Children were also conscripted including a boy identified merely as Saw Y---, age 13, from Noh Gkay village tract.<sup>215</sup>

Also in August 2008, Maung Chit Too’s DKBA Battalion #999 began implementing a new law in T’Nay Hsah Township, Pa’an District, effectively banning the consumption of alcohol at a time of year when post-harvest alcohol consumption among friends and family is most common.

On 11 August 2008, Saw H--- and Saw P---, both from T--- village, drank two bottles of liquor in Kawkareik town before returning to their village. Upon hearing of the previous nights activities DKBA officer Saw Lah Thay ordered the arrest of the two men. They were sent to work at the new DKBA camp at Taw Thoo Loe and forced to perform construction for 15 days. According to Saw H---:

*"When I went to work at the new DKBA camp, I saw 15 other villagers who had also been forced to work there. These villagers are from T---, Y--- and Th--- villages. After I worked for 15 days, DKBA officer Saw Lah Thay told me that if I drink alcohol again or if my mouth smells of alcohol again, I will have to work [forced labour] for three months. And, if I drink again [for a third time], I will have to join the DKBA army."*<sup>216</sup>

Following a 28 September 2008 battle with the KNLA near Htee Bper village of T'Moh village tract, Pa'an District, SPDC LIB #565 and DKBA Brigade #555 increased activity in the area and forced villagers to act as porters and as human mine sweepers.<sup>217</sup>

On 29 September 2008, Saw G--- and Saw H---, both aged 28 from C--- village, crossed the border into Thailand to buy food in Wah S'Kay village. On the way to Wah S'Kay the men passed through a DKBA #999 Special Battalion camp and registered. Once in Thailand the men bought groceries and drank alcohol. Upon crossing back into Burma a DKBA soldier named Saw Pah Bper accused them of smelling of alcohol. Saw Pah Bper repeatedly hit Saw H--- with the butt of his gun and beat him until his face was swollen. For the rest of the day the two villagers were beaten and tortured by the DKBA and then detained for the night.<sup>218</sup>

On 5 October 2008, Saw Ngah Gkyar, age 62 of Pah Khay Gkwee village was forced to walk in front of a DKBA battalion near Htee Bper Kee village. He stepped on a landmine and despite his injuries was not given any medical assistance. That same day another man, Saw Pah Doo, was forced to walk in front of a group of DKBA soldiers as they patrolled T'Moh village tract. Like Saw Ngah Gkyar, he stepped on a landmine and was not given any medical attention. The two men subsequently died.<sup>219</sup>

## **Monland Restoration Party (MRP)**

On 15 April, seven men lead by Nai Ein Dae fired into a passenger bus loaded with civilians returning from a pagoda in southern Ye Township. Three villagers, one a woman, were severely injured. A senior monk said:

*"(The) three villagers are Mons. They are worshippers from the pagoda and returned to their villages. One villager is from Sin-gu village and the woman is from Hangan village. Another one is the car driver. The remaining passengers had to send them suddenly to Ye Hospital. The car driver was in a serious situation, he was sent to Moulmein Hospital."*<sup>220</sup>

When the IMNA contacted Nai Chan Dein he said:

*"According to our men, when they are waiting for enemy, a ferry car appeared and founded Burmese soldiers are mixing with passengers. The Burmese soldiers shot us first and then we shot back. I know that some villagers will get injury. But I am not sure whether Burmese soldiers get injuries"*<sup>221</sup>

The MRP struck again when on 21 November 2008 they arrested 102 villagers travelling to their rubber and betel nut plantations. The arrested included 62 plantation owners and 40 workers from the villages of;

1. Sin Koo;
2. Toe Thet Ywar Thit;
3. Yin Ye;
4. Yin Dein; and
5. Kabyar.

All of the listed villages are in southern Ye Township. They were later released to go and retrieve ransoms, which were valued at 300,000 kyat for plantation owners and 30,000 kyat for workers. Some had to pay in gold or jewelry because they did not have enough cash.<sup>222</sup> On 22 November 2008, the headman of Yin Ye informed his villagers that they could not visit their plantations due to the MRP's activities. This was dire news for the villagers because, according to a source in the village: *"Most of the farm owners are facing a crisis because at the moment they have picked their betel nuts... But they left their nuts in piles and have not brought them back to the village yet. If we leave the nuts very long they will become spoiled."*<sup>223</sup>

## Shan State Army- North (SSA-N)

Chairman of the ceasefire Shan State Army (North) Peace and Development Council and Commander of North-East Region Command Major-General Aung Than Htut demanded that local militias from Mong Yaw, Wan Pang, and Mong Ha begin providing recruits. On 27 August 2008, villagers from every village tract in Hsenwi were called to be ready for military training. A villager who wished to remain anonymous was quoted as saying *"On 29 August, some people were still sending the name lists to the officials, while some people were asking for exemption. Each from every household, village and village tract must go for the services."* Those who refused to sign up were ordered to go to the local command post to explain why they wouldn't join.<sup>224</sup>



Soldiers of the SPDC-allied United Wa State Army (UWSA). The UWSA is widely considered to be the most powerful Non-State Armed Group (NSAG) in Burma with an estimated 20,000 soldiers. The UWSA has long been accused of being involved in the drug and arms trade. In December 2008, it was reported that the UWSA had recently developed the capacity to manufacture its own small arms and ammunition, becoming the first NSAG in Burma to do so.

[Photo: © Irrawaddy]

## 18.5 Official List of Ethnic Minority Groups in Burma

The following list is the SPDC list of the 134 'officially' recognised ethnic minorities from the eight main ethnic families in Burma. Please note that while this is the official list, some ethnic minorities, such as the Rohingya and the Kuki, for instance, have been deliberately omitted from this list as they are not recognised by the junta as being native to Burma as they are not provided with citizenship.

### Burman

1. Bamar
2. Dawei
3. Beik
4. Yaw
5. Yabein
6. Kadu
7. Ganan
8. Salon
9. Hpon

### Chin

10. Chin
11. Meithei (Kathe)
12. Saline
13. Ka Lin Kaw (Lushay)
14. Khami
15. Awa Khami
16. Khawno
17. Kaungso
18. Kaung Saing Chin
19. Kwelshin
20. Kwangli (Sim)
21. Gunte (Lyente)
22. Gwete
23. Ngorn
24. Zizan
25. Sentang
26. Saing Zan
27. Za How
28. Zotung
29. Zo Pe
30. Zo
31. Zahnyet (Zanniet)
32. Tapong
33. Tiddim (Hai Dim)
34. Tay Zan
35. Taishon
36. Thado
37. Torr
38. Dim
39. Dai (Yindu)
40. Naga
41. Tanghkul
42. Malin
43. Panun
44. Magun
45. Matu
46. Miram (Mara)
47. Mi-er
48. Mgan

49. Lushei (Lushay)
50. Laymyo
51. Lyente
52. Lawhtu
53. Lai
54. Laizao
55. Wakim (Mro)
56. Haulngo
57. Anu
58. Anun
59. Oo Pu
60. Lhinbu
61. Asho (Plain)
62. Rongtu

### Kachin

63. Kachin
64. Trone
65. Dalaung
66. Jinghpaw
67. Guari
68. Hkahku
69. Duleng
70. Maru (Lawgore)
71. Rawang
72. Lashi (La Chit)
73. Atsi
74. Lisu

### Karen (Kayin)

75. Kayin
76. Kayinpyu
77. Pa Le Chi
78. Mon Kayin (Sarpyu)
79. Sgaw
80. Ta Lay Pwa
81. Paku
82. Bwe
83. Monnepwa
84. Monpwa
85. Shu (Pwo)

### Karenni (Kayah)

86. Kayah
87. Zayein
88. Kayan (Padaung)
89. Gheko
90. Kebar
91. Bre (Ka Yaw)
92. Manu Manaw

93. Yin Talai
94. Yin Baw

### Mon

95. Mon

### Arakanese (Rakhine)

96. Rakhine
97. Kamein
98. Kwe Myi
99. Daingnet
100. Maramagyi
101. Mro
102. Thet

### Shan

103. Yun (Lao)
104. Kwi
105. Pyin
106. Yao
107. Danaw
108. Pale
109. En
110. Son
111. Khamu
112. Kaw (Akha E Kaw)
113. Kokang
114. Khamti Shan
115. Hkun
116. Taungyo
117. Danu
118. Palaung
119. Man Zi
120. Yin Kya
121. Yin Net
122. Shan Gale
123. Shan Gyi
124. Lahu
125. Intha
126. Eik Swair
127. Pa'O
128. Tai Loi
129. Tai Lem
130. Tai Lon
131. Tai Lay
132. Maingtha
133. Maw Shan
134. Wa

## 18.6 Ceasefire Status of Various Armed Ethnic Groups <sup>225</sup>

Group	Ceasefire Status
Arakan Liberation Party (ALP)	---
Chin National Front (CNF)	---
Communist Party of Burma (CPB-Arakan State)	1997
Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)	21 December 1994
Kachin Defence Army (KDA)	13 January 1991
Kachin Independence Organization (KIO)	1 October 1993
Karen National Union (KNU)	---
Karen National Union / Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council (KNU/KNLAPC)	11 February 2007
Karen Peace Force (KPF)	24 February 1997
Karenni National Defence Army (KNDA)	1996
Karenni National People's Liberation Front (KNPLF)	1994
Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP)	1995
Karenni Solidarity Organization (KnSO)	October 2002
Karenni State Nationalities Peoples' Liberation Front (KNPLF)	9 May 1994
Kayan National Guard (KNG)	27 February 1992
Kayan New Land Party (KNLP)	26 July 1994
Lahu Democratic Front (LDF)	---
Lahu National Organization (LNO)	---
Myeik-Dawei United Front (MDUF)	---
Mon Armed Group (MAG)	---
Mon Army, Mergui District (MAMD)	1997
Mong Tai Army (MTA)	2 January 1996
Myanmar National Democracy Alliance Army (MNDAA; 'Kokang')	21 March 1989
National Democratic Alliance Army – Eastern Shan State (NDAA-ESS; aka 'Mongla Group')	30 June 1989
National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN)	---
National United Party of Arakan (NUPA)	---
New Democratic Army - Kachin (NDA-K)	15 December 1989
New Mon State Party (NMSP)	29 June 1995
<i>Nyein Chan Yay A'Pweh</i> ('Peace Group')	8 November 1997
Palaung State Liberation Party (PSLP)	21 April 1991
Pa'O National Liberation Organisation (PNLO)	---
Pa'O National Organization (PNO)	11 April 1991
Pa'O People's Liberation Organization (PPLO)	---
Rakhine State All National Races Solidarity Party	6 April 1997
Rohingya National Alliance (RNA)	---
Shan State Army - South (SSA-South)	---
Shan State National Army (SSNA; aka SSA-Central)	1995
Shan State Nationalities People's Liberation Organization (SSNPLO)	9 October 1994
Shan State Progress Party (SSPP; aka SSA-North)	2 September 1989
United Wa State Army (UWSA)	9 May 1989
Vigorous Burmese Student Warriors (VBSW)	---
Wa National Organization (WNO)	---

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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 15<sup>th</sup> 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.

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