FOOD: To HAVE AND HAVE NOT

ADDRESSING HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

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THE ISSUES....

ADDRESSING HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

Refugees have lined Burma's borders for decades and non-governmental organizations have been instrumental in meeting the needs of hundreds of thousands who have been housed in camps in Thailand and Bangladesh. More recently, however, new populations have been identified that are in dire need of assistance. Reports indicate that Burmese migrant workers in Thailand; people who have fled the country but are unable to access refugee camps; and villagers who have been internally displaced within Burma may account for close to a million people in the midst of a humanitarian crisis. The question is: Under current circumstances, can the United Nations and other agencies effectively reach and serve these populations?

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The UN agencies operating in Burma have been under very close scrutiny by the international community since the early 1990s. Whether or not the agencies are capable of operating in a manner that benefits the people without supporting the military regime has been a concern of donors, governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). At the same time, the humanitarian situation inside the country continues to deteriorate. At a conference recently held in New York, medical professionals, NGO practitioners and government representatives discussed the UN's role and the mechanisms that exist for delivering assistance to Burma's neediest populations.

FOOD: TO HAVE AND HAVE NOT

Over the past several months, Burma's English-language newspaper, The New Light of Myanmar, has run numerous accounts of the country's great strides in agricultural development and increased food production. Article upon article tout the regime's campaign to reclaim "virgin, fallow and vacant wetlands," and the "Development of Agriculture as a Base" has been laid down by the State as one of its Four Economic Objectives. Meanwhile, a recent report by the People's Tribunal on Food Scarcity and Militarization in Burma has found that, due to the systemic practices of that same regime, food scarcity is "widespread and serious." Once the "rice-bowl of Asia," do we now find Burma unable to feed its own people? And if so, why?
THE HEALTH AND HUMANITARIAN SITUATION OF BURMESE POPULATIONS ALONG THE THAI-BURMA BORDER
By Chris Beyrer

THE UN IN BURMA
By David Chandler

THE ROLE OF UN AGENCIES IN BURMA AND ON ITS BORDERS
A Panel Discussion

VICTORIES OF THE STATE, THE PEOPLE AND THE TATMADAW
By Tekkatho Tin Kha

VOICE OF THE HUNGRY NATION
By the People's Tribunal on Food Scarcity and Militarization in Burma
ADDRESSING HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

THE HEALTH AND HUMANITARIAN SITUATION OF BURMESE POPULATIONS ALONG THE THAI-BURMA BORDER

From August 9-19, 1999, an evaluation of indigenous health services for Burmese populations along the Thai-Burma border was conducted by a U.S. team working with several local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The evaluation was facilitated by Chris Beyrer, MD, MPH, from Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health, and Michael Smit, RN, from the University of Maryland. Methods included extended interviews with program leaders, direct observation of clinic services, inpatient care, training sessions, and a series of site visits to populations served by the programs, including factory complexes in Tak Province, agricultural migrant worker settlements in Tak, Mae Hong Son and Chiang Mai Provinces, an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in Burma, and among urban residents in Tak. Structured participatory focus groups sessions were held with medics and clinic staff (three sessions), backpack health workers working cross-border (two sessions), and with traditional birth attendants and community leaders in internally displaced areas. Key informant interviews were also conducted. Both formal and informal discussion approaches were used to guide the focus groups. A separate report on the

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results of the evaluation of health services and needs has been completed. This report focuses on the current health and humanitarian situation among Burmese populations of the border zone.

I. INTRODUCTION

There have been remarkable increases and demographic shifts in the Burmese populations along the Thai-Burma border region over the past several years, which appear to have accelerated since 1995-96. While refugee populations in the established camps have remained relatively stable (at roughly 120,000 persons, largely ethnic Karen and Karenni) these populations are now a minority of those in need of health services, food security, and protection from rights abuses. The larger and growing populations include Burmese migrant workers to Thailand in factory and agricultural sectors, newly arrived refugees without formal refugee status, internally displaced persons (IDPs) inside Burma, Burmese sex workers, and Burmese urban residents in Thai cities and towns, including Mae Sot in Thailand’s Tak Province and surrounding areas.

The Thai Ministry of the Interior admitted that there were roughly 1 to 1.2 million Burmese migrants in Thailand by 1998, although official estimates are lower, and registered Burmese migrant workers number less than 250,000. In the Mae Sot area alone the non-governmental agency World Vision has documented 72 known factories with an estimated population of 50,000 workers, many of whom have families with them. Agricultural migrants are the most difficult to quantify, but include at least 100,000 Shans in upper northern Thailand, and another 100,000 Burmese further south (Tak, Kanchanaburi, Rayong), according to the Burma Border Consortium. The estimate of IDPs in the Thai-Burma zone on the Burmese side is 400,000 persons according to several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working along the border. Urban residents and those working in service jobs and as domestics are another large population difficult to assess and will not be addressed in this report.

While the numbers of both internally displaced persons and migrants to Thailand has grown, the demographic shifts have been perhaps more marked than the absolute numbers. Populations crossing to Thailand now include many more whole families with the elderly and children than in the past, and more of the migrants are not from areas of ethnic insurgency (such as the Karen or Shan areas); they are urban and rural Burmese from areas including Moulmein and Thaton in Mon State, the Irrawaddy Divisions, Bassein, and from as far as Arakan. These populations are overwhelmingly civilians, and many have fled from Burma since 1995, and significantly, since 1997. These new migrants have placed tremendous burdens on the health care system along the border, which was established primarily to provide services to the generation of students who fled after the 1988 uprising and ethnic insurgents and their families. The earlier model was field-based care for young people involved in armed struggle.
The needs now are much more centered on maternal and child health, family planning services, care of the old and chronically ill, and provision of health services to impoverished families employed or partially employed in the Thai agricultural and manufacturing sectors. The internally displaced population in this same period has expanded to an estimated 400,000 persons in the Thai-Burma zone, and an unknown number in widely dispersed areas including the Naga Hills, the Chin States, Arakan, and central Burma. What little is known concerning IDPs is best understood in the Shan and Karen areas, and this is due, at least in part, to the information and organizational capability provided by non-cease-fire groups.

The health and humanitarian challenges for these populations are staggering, and the unmet health needs diverse and changing. The constraints under which such services must currently be provided are also many and varied. Virtually all the groups in Thailand are vulnerable to local security concerns; providing services to IDPs in the context of the Burmese civil conflict is fraught with security and operational challenges; and Burmese program staff in either setting face security concerns similar to the people they serve. Harassment, fines, and detention by Thai authorities continue to complicate the lives and work of all concerned with providing services to these groups.

II. BORDER AREA POPULATIONS

Factory Workers

In the Mae Sot area of Tak Province there has been extensive development of factories and light manufacturing shops based on the availability of cheap Burmese labor. According to World Vision, which is operating an HIV education program in the factories, Mae Sot district now has 72 known factories and sweatshops employing an estimated 50,000 workers. Sectors include garments, canning, light manufacturing, and parts assembly. Most factories are closed to inspection and maintain on-site housing for Burmese illegal workers.

The evaluation team visited several large sweatshops in this industrial zone to assess the health and humanitarian status of workers. The first was a large Thai-owned canning complex with approximately 2,000 workers and their families. Management stated that 20% of the workers were Thai and the remainder Burmese. Of the 30 factory workers or family members the team met, all were Burmese (ethnic Burman or Mon) from urban/rural areas in southern Burma.

All of the Burmese came to Thailand illegally, are fearful of arrest, and thus live on site. Workers were living in four barn-like structures and a number of bamboo and tin shacks. This housing was intensely over-crowded, with families living in cardboard or plywood divisions within the barns, each roughly 8 by 10 foot square. Lighting, ventilation, cooking space, sewage, and water were grossly inadequate, with open sewage running through the lower slope barns. About 500 families were living in each barn. Workers earn between 40-50 baht per day and are required to work overtime when necessary. Overtime pay is five baht per hour, about 15 US cents. A mother of five whose husband worked in the factory (a Burmese family from Tavoy) said these wages allowed her to buy meat about twice a month. The family survived on rice and vegetables (bought from the owner) and...
was unable to save. The team was not permitted to visit the factory working areas, but did visit an on-site school. This was built by the Thai owner and was free for the Thai children—the workers’ families had to contribute to pay for a Burmese teacher, which they were doing. Only elementary education was available. Nearly all children over 12 years were out of school and working.

Major health problems were associated with the lack of access to care. Burmese workers fear arrest and fines if they leave the compound and are thus afraid to visit local health facilities. Typical fines are 3,000 baht to avoid a month’s jail time, or about 75 days’ pay. None of the persons interviewed could speak any Thai, further limiting access to Thai facilities. Drug and treatment costs were another barrier. Health problems included childhood illnesses, respiratory and diarrheal diseases, and complications of unsafe abortions—an outcome of lack of access to family planning. Younger women described fear of rape and sexual harassment from male management and senior staff; sexual advances many cannot refuse for fear of losing employment. Indeed, many of the Burmese “sex workers” identified at local clinics are women in factories, and they make up a significant component of the recent, steep rise in septic abortion cases presenting at Mae Tao Hospital.

The owner of this complex reportedly had extensive canning factories in other areas in Thailand but has moved all operations to Mae Sot in the past several years due to the availability of so much cheap and compliant Burmese labor.

The second site visited was a large complex of garment sweatshops on the Thai side of the Moei River. This was a Taiwanese-owned complex which had been built as a condominium development. The ground levels were converted to sweatshops, with upper levels housing ten workers per room. There were approximately 3000 workers in the complex. In contrast to the closed canning factory, this complex housed largely young single Burmese workers, about 75% of whom were women. Virtually all workers interviewed were ethnic Burmans. Salaries were in the 40-60 baht per day range, depending on experience. While this population was considerably healthier, and reported adequate salaries for single people to survive and send small remittances to families in Burma, the same issues of fear of arrest, inability to speak Thai, and sexual abuse by management prevailed. The complex had a brothel on-site where local men could access the workers. Women reported essentially no ability to refuse sexual favors to management, and abortion is a common form of pregnancy prevention. A smuggling dock was within walking distance of the complex, so these workers could, and did, visit family in Burma when able. The clothes are manufactured for the "Old Navy" brand sold in the US.

There is apparently considerable local Thai

Agricultural Migrants

This is a very large, widely dispersed, mobile and difficult-to-reach population. In the northern area (Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Mae Hong Son Provinces) the great majority of farm laborers are Shans, estimated by the Shan Human Rights Foundation at over 100,000. The majority live in huts or converted barns on farmland in small hidden settlements. Their living is much more seasonal and uncertain than that of factory workers and their security issues are much more acute. The health problems of this huge population include malaria, particularly among men; pesticide exposures; vaccine preventable childhood illnesses; and diarrheal diseases. About 75% of admissions for severe malaria at Mae Sot Hospital are male migrant farm laborers. Demographic patterns among these migrants have significantly changed. Before 1996-97, the majority was single adults or young couples. Recent migrants (1997-99) are generally multi-generational families with dependents. In contrast to seasonal migrants in the past, these new migrants generally cannot, and do not, return to Burma in the off-season. Among the Shans, many reported having lost their homes, land and livestock through the SPDC forced resettlement policies of the past four years. In the Shan areas there are essentially no health services for the majority of migrants.

The team visited two migrant settlements in the agricultural belt of southern Tak Province. The first was a series of shacks and one converted barn hidden off a dirt track on a large Thai orchard estate. This was home to about 300 families, a mixed Burman and Mon community, mostly from Moulmein, Bassein, and Pegu. The housing was cardboard and rice sacks stretched over bamboo frames, there was no electricity or running water, and the compound was extraordinarily over-crowded. Again, this was a settlement almost entirely of corruption officials and local military commanders and their demands for money and/or labor; confiscation or theft of food, livestock, and lands by local military. Few reported histories of any political involvement as reasons for fleeing; however these persons tended to be the most harassed. Virtually all of them told accounts of arrest, imprisonment, torture, and beatings.
whole families, with grandparents doing childcare while older children and other adults worked in the fields. Income varied from 30-50 baht per day, depending on the laborer and the availability of work. These were survival wages only, allowing no opportunity to save. Malnutrition was less of an issue however, than among children in the factories, as these families can forage in forest tracts and gather some wild foods in these areas.

We interviewed two older adults recently released from prison in Burma. The first was a National League for Democracy township activist in his sixties from lower Burma who had escaped with his entire family after release from his third jail term. He reported repeated beatings, torture, and chronic malnutrition in prison, and the total impoverishment of his family for his political activities. He was unable to work and was supported by grown children working on the farm.

The second was a Mon grandmother from Moulmein, who had fled two months before with two grown daughters, both of whom had also served prison sentences. This woman, and both daughters, had been jailed for two years and fled shortly after their releases. She was also the mother of two sons, both of whom were active in the 1988 uprising and had joined the armed resistance. One was killed in battle in 1992 against SLORC [State Law and Order Restoration Council] forces. The second, an ABSDF [exile student organization] member, returned to Burma in 1995 under a promised amnesty, but was immediately pursued by SLORC. The junta arrested his mother and sisters, detained them for two years, and released them only after the son's capture and death in detention. The mother reported frequent beatings and verbal abuse during her incarceration. Her elderly husband, who required care for chronic illness, died during her detention, as did a grandchild. The family lost their home and land during the detention. The surviving family was now living in a cardboard shack. The mother appeared to have a severe case of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The second settlement visited was a community of 120 families living on a rice and orchard plantation. This community was 18 months old, and composed of two groups of Mon, one from Moulmein and one from Thaton, who had fled since 1997. Again, burdens of forced labor and corrupt officials had led to their impoverishment in Burma. Many reported that they had lost their land and livelihood since the Mon cease-fire and could no longer survive in their home areas. Due to a compassionate Thai owner, this group was living in marginally better conditions, with access to running water, adequate food, and some degree of protection from local authorities while on site.

Internally Displaced Persons

The Burmese civil conflict and the policies of the SPDC toward ethnic peoples, most notably the forced relocation and forced resettlement of many populations, have led to large numbers of internally displaced persons within Burma.
ly land-mined areas. These are arguably the need-
iest and most difficult-to-access populations in the
current Burmese Diaspora.

An indigenous program to provide services to
these groups has been under development since
1995, using a mobile medical team approach. These
teams, with several medics, were eventually found
to be too large, and had difficulty reaching many
isolated IDP areas. To respond to these needs, local
medical groups, in collaboration with several eth-
nic organizations, developed a new model and pro-
gram based on backpack health workers. There are
currently 50 such backpack health workers serving
IDPs, with a target service population of 100,000
persons. Training for 60 more such workers will
begin this year.

Fourteen people participated in an evaluation of
the Backpack Program, including the management
team and seven backpack health workers. Several con-
straints were voiced by the group. These included:

SECURITY OF IDPS AND HEALTH WORKERS. This is
the major challenge. Threats include the Burmese
military, landmines, bandits active in IDP areas,
and security concerns while moving within
Thailand. Among the 50 workers in the first group
to work inside Burma this year, one backpack
worker was killed by a landmine while assisting the
IDP community he was serving to flee from an
SPDC attack. A second was arrested by SPDC
authorities while trying to reach a Karen IDP site.
His fate is currently unknown.

DISEASE RATES AND SEVERITY. Several workers
brought up issues related to the very high disease
and injury rates among the IDPs, including malar-
ia, diarrheal diseases, obstetric emergencies, and
landmine and other war-related injuries. In addi-
tion to high disease rates, severity, often due to lack
of early or appropriate care, is a further challenge.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND SUPPORT. The
backpack teams must rely on community partici-
pation and support to identify cases, transport
patients, provide space for treatment, and bring
members together for health promotion and edu-
cation sessions. In areas where strong ethnic, youth,
or women's organizations exist and function, these
relationships appear active and effective. However,
where they do not exist, backpack workers have
had to do considerable grassroots organizing to
mobilize communities.

IDPS IN JUNGLE/FOREST AREAS. Several workers
discussed the grave difficulties of providing services
to displaced villagers hiding in forest areas. These
groups appear to be in the most severe health situ-
ations, with widespread malnutrition and under-
nutrition, chronic insecurity, and high exposure to
forest illnesses, including malaria and other infec-
tious diseases. Most survive on bamboo shoots and
other forest foods markedly lacking in protein.
These groups are generally villagers who have been
targeted for forced relocation programs but do not
want to leave their lands. They move into hiding in
forest tracks, generally near their home villages, and
attempt to evade SPDC patrols. In several Karen
areas Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)
irregulars working with SPDC are a significant
threat. In both Shan and Karen areas bandit gangs
looting abandoned villages are also a major securi-
ty threat. All three groups, SPDC, DKBA, and ban-
dit gangs, regularly target grain stores and livestock
for their supply needs in forest areas, further impov-
erishing these IDPs.

Morbidity and mortality are extremely high.
With the exception of indigenous healers, the back-
pack teams are currently the only health care providers available to these populations. SPDC health services have little or no penetration in most areas and are widely feared by locals. In a few cases IDP areas do have SPDC supported health workers, however, they appear to have no supplies or medications and have, on several occasions, come to the backpack teams requesting essential drugs.

The team visited one large IDP settlement. This was a community of about 5,200 people drawn from three Karen villages. The three source communities had been attacked and burnt down by Burmese-backed troops in a January-February 1999 systematic campaign. Community members and village headmen were unable to say whether this was done by SPDC alone or by SPDC with DKBA support. They had no explanations for these attacks and village burnings. Community members maintained some links to their home villages, and men were visiting their homes with some regularity to collect food. The area between their new settlement and their home villages was heavily landmined early this year, presumably to prevent their return. At the time of our visit, one man had just been killed by a mine after tending to his cattle. Security for this community was provided by Karen National Union (KNU) troops active in the area. Villagers were adamant that they did not want to leave their land or livestock and move to Thailand as refugees. Food security is the major concern, as the community is unable to grow enough food for the existing population, and about 100 persons a month were continuing to arrive from SPDC attacked areas. Malaria is the other principal health threat. This settlement was a forest area seven months before and is heavily malarial.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY OPTIONS

Summary

The past three to four years have seen an increase in the number of internally displaced persons in Burma, increasing migration to Thailand, and a dramatic shift in the demographics of migrants from young adults to multi-generational families. These changes appear to be the result of cumulative effects of the political, humanitarian, and economic crisis in Burma. In ethnic areas including the Shan and Karen regions, forced pop-

This map is diagrammatic. The areas shown are approximate indications of the boundaries to the areas in which village relocations have been reported. Not all villages in these areas have been relocated. Map courtesy of the Burmese Border Consortium (BBC).
ulation transfers, village burnings, and military assaults on ethnic communities have driven hundreds of thousands of minority people from their homes. Another large and growing migrant population appears to be urban and rural Burmese from southern areas, particularly Mons and Burmans from the southern and coastal regions. These groups have been forced to flee largely due to the additive effects of demands for forced labor, heavy corruption, taxation, impoverishment, and theft or confiscation of property, livestock and land.

Paired recurring themes among migrants from all areas are the impossibility of survival for their families under the current regime in Burma and the intense desire to go home, if and when this is possible. For those in Thailand, the fear and real threat of arrest and harassment by Thai authorities make their lives ones of constant insecurity. For IDPs, the struggle to survive in zones of political, military, and criminal insecurity is constant and precarious.

Clearly, the long-term principal policy option for addressing this wide array of social problems is political change in Burma. As long as current policies prevail, and Burmese families continue to find life impossible in their home communities, these populations will continue to flee. This is true in non-cease-fire ethnic areas, in cease-fire areas such as Mon State, and in Burman areas impoverished by SPDC policies. Similarly for IDPs, short-term solutions including increased food or health aid, or fleeing to Thailand as refugees, will not resolve the fundamental issue of villagers forced off their lands. Greater and urgent pressure must be brought to bear on SPDC and its proxies to cease ethnic cleansing in minority areas.

**Policy Options**

Support for IDPs through SPDC-sanctioned programs, including those of UN agencies, are highly unlikely to reach IDPs in jungle areas for several reasons:

SPDC health programs do not now reach these populations. In the few communities backpack workers encountered that do have government health programs, these staff have no supplies.

Any agency appearing with SPDC security (and some security will be essential, given the levels of banditry and social chaos in the forests) will cause IDPs to flee.

IDPs are in the forests and hills to avoid leaving their homes and living in forced resettlement areas. Programs which provide support for IDPs are likely to do so not in jungles, but in resettlement sites. Thus support for IDPs could easily be perceived as a program of outside support for ethnic cleansing—as only IDPs who accepted the loss of their homes might receive aid.

The argument could be made that those areas with active resistance movements are targeted by SPDC for forced relocations as part of counter-insurgency activities, and that these policies could be addressed by cease-fires. However, many recent migrants are now coming from cease-fires areas, including Mon State, where there is little or no active insurgent activity.
The situation of the Mon now coming in large numbers to Thailand suggests that the end of insurgency would have little or effect on the status of communities now targeted by SPDC.

Thailand and other regional business investors are profiting significantly from Burmese migrant labor. The harassment of Burmese in Thailand for fines and short imprisonment, however, benefits only the Thai police and security agencies. These policies have clearly had little or no effect on migration rates, but have served to restrict access to health care, education, and decency of life for countless Burmese.

Thai authorities should be urged to address the widespread abuse and bribe taking by Thai authorities of the vulnerable Burmese in their country. Sexual assaults against Burmese women and girls in detention and in factories must be addressed to the full extent of Thai law.

Burmese migrant workers to Thailand and their families, both in agricultural and factory/sweatshop settings, are a rapidly growing population with considerable needs. Currently, many of these people remain undocumented, in hiding, and subject to a wide range of abuses and health threats. Health and food security programs for these populations are an urgent priority, but are currently sharply curtailed by Thai policy.

Aid programs targeting Burmese migrant workers and their families are an emerging priority. These populations, however, are more difficult to reach and support than those in formal refugee settings, and current programs are inhibited by Thai policy. Aid to these populations must be increased, and this aid must be delivered in a context acceptable to Thailand and in cooperation with Thai authorities.

Finally, indigenous organizations have managed to provide some services cross-border to IDPs, and indeed, these are the only services that can currently reach these hidden and isolated communities. These efforts should be supported by aid agencies interested in assisting these populations. There are essentially three approaches to assisting the Burmese communities in this crisis: aid inside Burma, working through or with SPDC; aid in Thai refugee settings; or cross-border indigenous programs.

Given the realities of the current situation, only cross-border interventions by trained indigenous staff appear to have any hope of reaching needy IDP populations. These programs should be supported, expanded, and allowed to operate without harassment in Thailand.

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This address was presented in New York on October 5, 1999, by David Chandler, former Burma country director for the non-governmental organization, World Vision International.

Mr. Chandler participated in a panel discussion on the role of UN agencies in Burma and along its borders at the annual donors meeting of the Burmese Border Consortium. The meeting was hosted by the International Rescue Committee, Church World Service, and the Open Society Institute. This address was transcribed and edited by Burma Debate.
My talk is less about the situation in Burma and more about my perspective on what I think the role of the UN in Burma is, can, and should be. I'm presenting my personal view, which is not necessarily shared by World Vision, and is most definitely an NGO [non-governmental organization] perspective. I try to keep the big picture in mind as much as possible, but over the last ten years, with eight of those years being in or involved in Burma, I have been an NGO implementer, and that is my starting point.

Because of the country’s context, operating in Burma is extremely complex. Aside from the usual problems with infrastructure, limited capacity stemming from isolation, ethnic diversity and all the tension involved in that, as well as limited material and financial resources, Burma is also complicated by multiple stakeholders who do not agree on the long-term objectives for the country. They don’t even acknowledge the legitimacy of the others’ existence. There is also intense scrutiny of every action, and politicization of every activity, particularly, in my experience, humanitarian assistance.

For the UN operating in Burma, it is further complicated by its own organizational liabilities and challenges. The success or failure of the UN to date has been deeply influenced by internal as well as external factors and constraints. In spite of this, I believe a solid foundation has been established. With understanding and a strategic policy position, it is very possible for the UN to play a significant and constructive role in the long-term development of Burma.

I believe the role of the UN in Burma should be quite straightforward. The role should be: to facilitate the development of the human potential of the entire nation within a reasonable time frame. The how and whys of achieving this noble objective however, are more complex, especially in Burma.

Typically the UN seeks to achieve its developmental objectives in a given country by: doing no harm; promoting mutual understanding; fostering cooperation and coordination; formulating and articulating shared long-term strategic goals; assisting in the establishment or expansion of the necessary infrastructure, institutions, capacities, and operational framework; as well as providing resources and input necessary to achieve those shared long-term strategic goals. This is my definition of what the UN tries to do, somewhat idealized perhaps, but I think it’s appropriate.

In most countries, the UN works towards its objectives through the existing systems, structures, and mechanisms, most of which are, or are at least part of, government structures. But in Burma, this traditional UN approach is knocked off its track. In a Governing Council resolution passed in 1992 the United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] was required to change its mode of operation. It was told to work outside of the existing government institutions and work directly with people’s groups. As you can imagine this resolution placed a number of constraints on UNDP, while at the same time creating some interesting opportunities.

Being the largest agency in the UN family, the UNDP resident representative is often the resident coordinator of the UN agencies operating
in a given country. That is true in Burma. Because of the Governing Council resolution, however, the UNDP is now required to operate in a way that is not required of the other agencies. The unique requirements placed on the UNDP complicated the relationships between the UNDP and the other UN agencies operating inside the country. It also caused the de facto military government to examine, with even greater vigor, the actions and operations of the UNDP and other UN agencies. And, it gave the military government a way to treat the UNDP and the other agencies differently.

The UNDP responded to the Governing Council resolution with a comprehensive, integrative, development program called the Human Development Initiative, or HDI. This program, ingenious and appropriate as I believe it is, is bureaucratically quite complicated. It is a program that essentially seeks to facilitate grassroots development by providing a range of programs in a participatory, bottom-up way. To bring in the requisite expertise quickly, the UNDP in effect subcontracted out the sectoral components of its program to other UN agencies for implementation. So the HDI project officers who are employed to administer components of the HDI, officially are employed by the UN agency they call their head agency, but they must implement their projects according to the rules of another UN agency, the UNDP. This bureaucracy alone makes implementation very difficult.

In addition, HDI project officers face other variables, including stringent accountability requirements and an unforgiving work environment. To ensure compliance with the comprehensive Governing Council requirements, a great many time-consuming accountability requirements were added. These include intensive yearly reviews, along with the normal regular progress reports, and rigorous approval requirements for any action taken. So they are scrutinized every step of the way, and that slows things down.

There is also the unforgiving work environment. The de facto military government was upset, of course, that the mode of operation of the UNDP was changed; the UNDP was treating them differently from any other country in the world, even though their status in the UN was unchanged. The fact that there was also less access to the cash flow required to administer the UNDP projects further strained relations.

The Governing Council resolution may well have been the right step to take. However, it is important to recognize the level of complexity it introduced to program implementation for the HDI, as well as for all the UN agencies:

Due to the Governing Council Resolution of 1992, the UNDP team in Burma is required to implement programs outside of the existing government structures and institutions, even though they are present in the country at the invitation of this de facto military government.

They are required to use operational approaches outside of their traditional mode of operating. They must establish programs that work directly with local communities and these programs should be responsive to the needs of the community, participatory, independent, and ultimately self-sustaining.

They are required to use existing UN agencies, systems, procedures, and personnel to implement
these extraordinary programs. And they are required to involve international NGOs in this process.

I'm a big fan of the concept of the UN. One person said to me a couple years ago, "If the UN didn't exist you would have to invent it." That probably is true. But there are limits. The UN is a large bureaucratic structure. Like any organization it has its internal politics. Add this to the picture of multiple stakeholders, both within as well as outside the UN—donors for example [who] all have a wide range of opinions and perspectives—and you can see that the pressure placed on the UNDP team is amazing.

Burma has a de facto military government that is very suspicious of outside influence and an opposition group that is extremely concerned about the secondary impact of humanitarian assistance and how it might affect the prospects for political change. The scrutiny and attention Burma attracts for the comparatively small UN program it supports, is brutal. Understanding the inherent complexities of implementing UN programs in Burma, explains why sometimes things don't function as well as they might.

But the UN is accomplishing many things in Burma. This I will readily and happily acknowledge; I do not believe, however, that the UN is achieving anywhere near its potential. This crystallized for me recently when a diplomat asked me why the UN is not achieving its potential in Burma. That question stopped me in my tracks. It's not because people aren't capable or they aren't trying. It's not because the situation is impossible, although I believe it's very, very difficult. The reason the UN has not lived up to its potential is because the UN asked its normal personnel to use its normal budgetary processes and its normal systems and procedures, to implement extraordinary programs designed to achieve extraordinary results. I think we've asked a lot of the UN, and that I think we need to acknowledge. It's easy to engage in UN-bashing, but I think we ought to be aware of the situation in which they've been placed.

So I would not give up on the UN, and I certainly would not give up on Burma. I believe there are important roles for the UN to play in Burma, and I believe there are important roles for the international community to play.

Humanitarian assistance can add to the capacities of social infrastructure that are necessary to achieve the kind of long-term repercussions that we all desire and welcome for the people of Burma. It's the people of Burma that this is all about. As long as certain caveats and guidelines are followed, I firmly believe that humanitarian assistance can and should be delivered in Burma at this time.

Burma is not the only country in the world with a restrictive and highly challenging working environment. Furthermore, the UN is not the only agency that works in these countries. There are other agencies tackling the same challenging contexts. Among these agencies is a wide range of non-governmental organizations or NGOs, operating with a wide range of modalities. I would say that these organizations are most successful when they study the country context, seek to understand the inherent strengths and constraints, determine which methods and modalities are likely to be most effective to achieve their stated goals and objectives, and then develop an operational strategy accordingly.

Over the past 50 years, NGOs have developed a reputation for having the ability to inexpensively implement relief and development programs at the grassroots level, directly with people's groups. When done well, these programs prove to be participatory, independent, responsive to the needs of the people, dynamic, and lead to sustainability.

Many NGOs have developed a strong track record for solid performance and for serving multiple stakeholders. All accomplished while continuing to be people-focused and community-focused. Keep in mind there is a natural shake-out. Those NGOs that consistently do not perform well do not get funded.

Peter Drucker, the management guru, argues that NGOs have much to share with businesses in regards to the management of a complex product-process mix. Perhaps NGOs have much to share with the UN as well. I would like to believe that this is at least part of the reason that the donor community insisted that the UNDP/HDI program be implemented with the involvement of NGOs.

There have been several deterrents, however, to the effective involvement of NGOs in the recent UNDP/HDI-funded projects:
Mixed, and perhaps, unreasonable performance expectations for the UNDP and other UN agencies.

Unclear roles and expectations of the NGOs. A funding time lag. It has taken as long as 12 months to be funded by the UN, and this is when you have an 18-month time limit to implement your program.

And of course, government anger.

One of the issues that we NGOs anticipated was that the de facto military government would be angry that the UNDP was not operating in its usual manner. We asked the UNDP and the UNDCP [United Nations Drug Control Programme] to earmark a portion of their funds specifically for NGO use. This was not done. When the government reacted, many NGOs found that they had become a political football, caught between the military government and the UNDP. At first, working with UNDP funds seemed like a wonderful option to add to the extremely limited funding mix available to NGOs. After a while the UN funds became more of a curse.

But I believe that amidst this complex and difficult situation, the UN and the NGOs have accomplished a great deal. Much more is needed however, and much more can be done. I propose the following recommendations:

Continue and expand the coordination and cooperation role of the UN. This is important. UNDP is well positioned to play an important umbrella role in Burma, for the whole UN aid system. This includes setting an operational tone and setting standards for all agencies working in the country. If the UNDP plays this role of cooperation and coordination, it would begin to resolve the inter-agency rift that the military government is using as a wedge.

Establish and use coordination and cooperation mechanisms with NGOs. There is a great desire and need for the UNDP to play an active role in this regard.

Earmark funds that are intended for implementation by NGOs only. These funds would not be for use by the UNDP itself and would not be [dispersed] through existing government structures and institutions; they'd be earmarked only for NGOs.

HIV/AIDS is a major problem and needs a concentrated effort. Use the enormous HIV/AIDS problem as a focal point for humanitarian assistance. Earmark more funds to address this pressing need that cannot be, and in good conscience should not be, postponed.

UNDP should continue its liaison role with the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi. This is an important role the UN can play because of its status in the international community. Furthermore, communication between NGOs and the NLD has been called for by the NLD and many human rights groups. The pressure on NGOs to communicate with the opposition groups is increasing. As part of its "umbrella" function, the UN system should consider developing an informal mechanism for communications between the NGO community residing in Burma and the NLD.

[Communication] cannot be done formally, but it can be done informally. If the UN fulfills this need, then the process remains somewhat apolitical. If an embassy facilitates this process for NGOs there is a danger of the entire effort being politicized to the point that it is destructive to the very objectives we all seek to achieve, that is, to help the people of Burma. I would ask that the UN bear that burden, and try to play that role as part of the umbrella function for helping NGOs working in the country.

In closing, I would recommend that these further options be considered:

Acknowledge that humanitarian assistance is necessary and appropriate in Burma at this time, so that it is depoliticized and positive action can be taken.

Allow the UNDP/HDI programs to propose alternative operational frameworks so that good development processes are more likely to be fostered and perpetuated. Build on their current foundation.

Consider funding an NGO council to formulate, manage, and monitor the development framework and processes used in Burma. In the beginning this effort could be focused on HIV/AIDS. The NGOs in the country are working to form a council that might someday access donor groups. If successful, the council's role and operations could be expanded to other areas.
On October 5, 1999, a group of practitioners and representatives of governmental and non-governmental agencies gathered in New York to discuss the humanitarian needs of Burmese inside the country and along the borders. The panelists, Mr. Jack Dunford, director of the Thailand-based Burmese Border Consortium (BBC); Mr. David Chandler, former Burma country director for World Vision International; Dr. Chris Beyrer, director of the Fogarty AIDS International Training and Research Program at Johns Hopkins University; and Mr. David Yang, Senior Coordinator for Democracy Promotion at the U.S. Department of State, shared their views at the annual BBC donors meeting. The discussion was transcribed and edited for *Burma Debate*. 
There are two categories. There are refugees who would like to be in the camps, but are not allowed in, and there are refugees who choose not to be in the camps. We are aware of the ones who are not allowed into the camps because they come back and forth across the border. They ask for help, and in some cases we are able to provide assistance. The main problem is the southern half of the border, from Sangklaburi going south. That’s where there are certainly thousands of potential refugees.

The other category is those who choose not to go to the camps. We are aware of those numbers from the local communities. For example, in one Thai-Karen village, there are now 200 families, but only 63 of those are actually Thai-Karen. The others have all come in from Burma over the last 15 years, mostly in the last three years. The border is very porous. The local population is closely related to the population across the border. They accept these people; they allow them to settle in their villages. We’re beginning to think maybe the number of these people is even higher than we thought.

Q • Mr. Dunford, you said that there are a number of people living outside the refugee camps along the Thai/Burma border. Can you tell us about this population?

JD • There are two categories. There are refugees who would like to be in the camps, but are not allowed in, and there are refugees who choose not to be in the camps. We are aware of the ones who are not allowed into the camps because they come back and forth across the border. They ask for help, and in some cases we are able to provide assistance. The main problem is the southern half of the border, from Sangklaburi going south. That’s where there are certainly thousands of potential refugees.

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Q • Mr. Chandler, could you give us some examples of projects your own NGO [non-governmental organization] World Vision conducts, and how they relate to the betterment of the people of Burma?

DC • When I first got involved in the Burma situation, it was very clear that there were a lot of different opinions, and it was a very, very heated, volatile discussion. Once inside Burma, I had a very different impression than when I was outside. Outside there was a feeling at the time (1991), that the government was going to topple momentarily and if we waited for a year or two, we could all go to work inside together. Inside, I had a very different feeling: it's going to take 10-20 years to have any impact whatsoever. That was the approach that we took. We based our approach, number one, on capacity-building, because of the isolation and because of the deterioration of the infrastructure that had [taken place since] 1962. Capacity-building was number one.

Good information was number two. There was little knowledge of the situation inside of Burma, especially in terms of humanitarian need, because the data of the government was so flawed. And number three was advocacy; internal and external advocacy to raise awareness, to use the information that we had to make a productive impact.

On that basis, we tried to develop a program. Our program is similar to the HDI [Human Development Initiative of the UN Development Programme] approach. We target key areas. We have four townships, three in Yangon and one in Mandalay, where we focus multiple activities. We do health, which includes maternal/child health, disability,
prise development, giving loans to poor people and building capacities that way. And HIV/AIDS programs. We try to integrate all these. As you can imagine, there's a lot of overlap in these programs.

To give an example, we created a group, a steering committee, of 12 people who are not involved typically in decision-making. They are not part of the government or any administrative structure. They formed the steering committee to develop a microenterprise project. We asked them to design a program for giving loans to the very poor—to develop their own criteria. That criteria was poor, single mothers with families of three to four children. The process took several hours a day for three weeks, and at the end of the time we apologized. Our staff went to them and said, "We're really sorry. We had no intention of taking so much time. We know that every minute we take away from you is time not spent earning money, and we know how desperate you all are." They turned to us and said, "Don't ever apologize. No one has ever asked our opinion before." So our approach is to create pockets and groups that learn to work together, learn to build their own capacities, within their own townships and wards,... Within those small circles, we can have an impact.

I mentioned the four townships, three in Yangon and one in Mandalay, but we also have six townships along the border at the crossover points into Thailand. The main crossover points are Tachilek to Mae Sai, Myawaddy to Mae Sot, and Kawthaung to Ranong. We found that a lot of the fisherman were coming from Dawei, so we have HIV/AIDS projects in Dawei and Myeik as well as in Kawthaung. And we have a project in Kengtung, which is just northwest of Tachilek. These are key areas for people moving towards the border.

We try to be participatory. We try to be bottom-up and to build the capacity of our own staff. Our project started with one person eight years ago. We now have about 180. Our budget was a couple hundred thousand U.S. dollars a year in the beginning, it's now close to two million a year. And I think the biggest single contribution we have made is the staff that we're building. We have staff who can write project proposals that are approved by international donors. We're building that kind of capacity.

Q • Mr. Chandler, [if the U.S. Congress were to] earmark some funds specifically for NGOs—how would you conceive of an oversight for that? Congress has its oversight of the UNDP funds to ensure funds are not going to the government.... Could you perceive of an oversight that includes the opposition, the NLD, to make sure there are no "GONGOs" [government-sponsored non-governmental organizations] involved?

Another question: Some of the programs that you're doing in urban areas probably are very different from those trying to reach the IDPs in more rural areas. I wonder if you really think there's a way to provide aid to those IDP areas from inside? And I would like Jack Dunford and Dr. Beyrer to comment on this as well.

DC • Regarding funding, I have my own ideas as to what could be done. All donors have their own accountability requirements. One way to work with potential U.S. government oversight requirements is to use the UN. Let them distribute funds to NGOs doing appropriate work. Furthermore, if we believe the UN has done a good job, now give them more room to work. One possibility might be to create an advisory council of people that we all know understand development and understand the situation. [They could] then make decisions and not be so hamstrung. But I'm not going to answer the specific question of what I think should be done, because I don't know enough of all the constraints to be able to fashion an appropriate plan. It's going to be difficult, and
In terms of reaching the IDPs, maybe we can't do it directly at this time. But by being there and setting proper models and building experience, we develop the capacity of Burmese who can then also do it themselves.

JD • Just to be clear on IDPs, there are IDPs throughout Burma. There are some IDPs that are easily accessible. Those in the satellite towns around Rangoon being a fine example.... But the areas on the Burma side [of the border with Thailand], nobody has access to those areas.

COMING FROM THE BURMA SIDE

AND TRYING TO ADDRESS THE

NEEDS OF THOSE INTERNALLY

DISPLACED PERSONS IS

JUST VERY UNREALISTIC.

Dr. Chris Beyrer, Johns Hopkins University

from inside Burma. There is no assistance for these people from the Burma side at this time. The only assistance is being provided at risk from the Thai border. The scale of this particular IDP population is huge.... There is no assistance, and the situation is deteriorating. At the moment, there doesn't appear to be any mechanism by which you could provide assistance from the other side, especially at a time when the problem is not being acknowledged by the authorities, or even being analyzed by those agencies who are working in the country. My main point is that the problem needs to be properly analyzed first. There are no easy answers. We have to look at ways in which this could begin to be addressed.

CB • It's one of those painful situations where essentially you want to agree with everybody. I would say in terms of what we know about the Thai-Burma border, you are exactly right. I very much have to agree with and underscore what Jack said about the inability of anybody from the Burma side to access the IDP communities that we know about.... And in the case of a lot of other areas, for example the IDP situation in the Naga State, we know even less. It is really a black hole, information-wise. I think the same thing is probably true in many areas in the Chin States, where there are clearly problems.

I just recently came from some IDP areas inside Burma. It's very interesting. Some of these folks have moved close enough to Thailand to be accessible by cross-border programs. And even though the situation for them is extremely tough, and food security is a very fundamental issue, they're getting some IDP health care programs cross-border. This is the first time they have ever really had anybody addressing their health needs. Particularly in some Karen areas, where people have never had anything except what they could gather, literally, in the forest. We tried to see if there was any duplication of effort, what kind of health programs, drug treatments, malaria treatment, were available to these people when they were in their home communities, in these areas which are source areas for IDPs. There really is nothing there. Nobody gets there. There are some SPDC supported medics in some areas, but they haven't had regular medical supplies in years. So I think at this point, coming from the Burma side and trying to address the needs of those Internally Displaced Persons is just very unrealistic.
The cross-border activities are very small, but they also can get into areas where it's very difficult for anybody but local people who speak the languages, and who can go undercover, to go. They are having some impact and they're delivering what little health care is there. For example, right now there are about 50 such people with one program who try and cover 2000 people each during cross-border interventions, and that reaches about 100,000, which they estimate in the area where they work is perhaps a third of the pocket. So, for the relatively small programs there are many things that can be done, but coming from the other side into those IDP areas, nobody's done it in a very long time. The security situation is worse now than it's been in a long time. So I don't think we can be optimistic.

Q • Mr. Chandler, one aspect of the UN role not mentioned [here] is the mediation efforts authorized by the UN Secretary General's office to resolve the crisis between the NLD and the military regime. In this role the UN is supposed to be addressing the root causes of the humanitarian crisis, for which you are calling for immediate attention. So I would be very keen to hear your comment, and the perception that you share with the other NGOs working inside Burma, about the need to address some of the root causes that account for the humanitarian crisis in Burma.

DC • I believe that the UN has been working hard, and has come up with some creative solutions and some ideas. Some have been made public, perhaps prematurely, and then have been buffeted quite strongly, but I think they've been creative in working on various ways to try to move the debate forward. That to me is the only way you can measure it, not whether they're successful yet, because it's going to take time. Are they moving things forward? Are they pushing the government? Are they pushing Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD? Are they trying to create opportunities for discussion and for resolutions? I think they are, along with the rest of the international community. Obviously we can criticize them; there may be ways that they could do it better, but I think they are doing a lot in that area.

I do believe that much of the humanitarian problem in Burma has to do with the last 30 years of government. There's no question about that. I don't think that means that because of that, the people should continue to suffer. We need to find ways to work creatively to provide humanitarian assistance, and I believe that the NGOs [working inside] all agree on that. There are lots of things we don't agree on and NGOs are notorious for having a wide diversity of opinion, but I think we do agree fundamentally on certain ways of operating, the caveats that I alluded to about maintaining appropriate contacts with the government and the ministries with whom we work: When we bring supplies in we monitor them. We don't exchange money at the official rate. We always exchange it at the market rate or close to it. The NGOs have different ways of addressing concerns about working with the de facto military government, but I think we're in agreement on fundamental modes of implementation.

Q • Given that we have talked about the deteriorating humanitarian situation on the border that [could be] a humanitarian emergency before long, how bad would things have to get in terms of the health and sanitation, or infant mortality, for either the nations in the region or the US and others, to try to come up with a humanitarian intervention program?

DC • Let me just say quickly that I believe the situation is very bad now. I just don't have much data I can give you that everyone would agree on, but our impression is that it is very bad. Four years ago I used to say that people in a lot of our wards and townships, urban poor, were struggling to get one meal a day. Now in many of our wards we're finding it's...
The prices have gone up so high that the amount of money that people earn doesn't come close to paying for rice, so people can't meet their needs. I hear that from so many different corners and quadrants. Everything stems from there.

Then you look at health services, and what Dr. Beyrer said about health workers never reaching certain areas. I did a paper that said that 60% of the country has some coverage, government or other coverage. I'd say thirty percent of the country has significant coverage. Another 30% probably has coverage by somebody, a para-professional, coming every two or three months, and then 40% doesn't have any coverage. So health-wise I think it's disastrous. Also with regard to education, I can give you data that would be very shocking.

JD • I can make two or three points here. One is that there's an unbelievable amount of data already available. There's an enormous amount of data being compiled systematically along the border. Refugees are arriving every day telling new stories that can be updated. The problem is that all of the data is coming from ethnic groups, who could be seen to have vested interests, [so some] are not readily accepting this information.... It's about time that the international community, the UN agencies, make their own assessments. Let them look at the data. The data is there. It should be possible to quantify the scale of this humanitarian crisis.

Mr. Chandler mentioned how often people are eating. The reality is that throughout this entire border area there is a food crisis, there is a nutrition crisis. One of the cross-border agencies working extensively with IDPs has come up with a useful classification of need, people who are in need of humanitarian assistance, of food. Category A consists of people who are still eating two meals of rice a day, but they don't have enough rice to get them through to the next harvest. Category B is people who are only eating one meal of rice a day and making do with a rice soup for the second meal. In category C, people don't have any rice. They are surviving off boiled rice soup and roots and so on.

No one has exact figures, but overall they're estimating that at least 40% of the population falls into category B or C. It's a huge number of people who just don't have enough to eat. We have no accurate estimate of the number of people falling into that third category—not even getting one meal a day—but there's a huge number of people throughout this border area who are living on the edge of survival. They're living off their wits, they're living off of whatever they can carry in from the jungle. The need is dramatic.

What would make anything happen for someone to take notice? The problem is that people don't go in to witness it themselves; it is in effect, a war zone. It's dangerous. Probably the only thing that would attract attention is when it gets so bad that there is a massive flow of people into Thailand. That will gain attention. That will pull the alarm bells in the Thai government and probably engage the international community. But it's unfortunate that you have to wait until things are so bad that you have a total collapse of the humanitarian situation.

DY • In these—humanitarian crises, the root cause is so often the fact of horrible misgovernment. How bad it would need to get for the international community to intervene? ... I can't comment on how bad it would need to get, but certainly, we need, [in terms of] our own diplomacy, to raise the issue higher than we have been, both in unilateral fora and in discussions with other sympathetic governments and regional groupings like ASEAN.

DC What would it take? Mr. Dunford said, "Well, it would take a mass exodus ...." I don't think it's going to happen. You looked at the maps of
Burma border. What they've done is, when they displace people, they move them westwards towards the cities and towns inside Burma itself. So the only people who go over the border are the ones who are really close to the fringe and can go in that direction. Most everybody else has been funneled inward. I believe they're controlling how much it is possible for people to even escape.

In terms of a mass exodus, I think it's very unlikely because the government, I think, is conscious of that possibility and would not want it to happen again.

Q • Jack Dunford mentioned that there were 120,000 refugees in camps in Thailand and well over 200,000 throughout Thailand. Not much has been said about the protection issues related to these refugees, particularly the likelihood of a repatriation sometime in the near future, something for which there may be reasonable cause for concern, given statements of officials in the Thai government, and the increased involvement of UNHCR in Thailand. Some people interpret these as initial steps for a repatriation. So I'd like Mr. Dunford to comment. Also David Yang, if you could comment on the US policy on the issue of repatriation.

JD • I think I can be positive as far as UNHCR in Thailand is concerned. We were worried that with UNHCR coming to the border, it may be a registration exercise. That it may be, in effect, closing the door, preparing people for repatriation. But the experience has been a very positive one. UNHCR is on the border and protection is their main concern. Most of their efforts to date have gone into registering the refugees and starting to develop admissions procedures for new arrivals with the Thai authorities. So our perspective is that the arrival of UNHCR has been extremely positive. And as far as the Thai government is concerned, ... for the moment, I don't see any real prospect of Thailand suddenly taking a hard-line or refugees' asylum really being under threat.

DY • I'm sorry, I'm not an expert on the refugee issue. Just let me say that it's surely a cornerstone of our policy. We welcome the entry of

THERE'S A HUGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE THROUGHOUT THIS BORDER AREA WHO ARE LIVING ON THE EDGE OF SURVIVAL.

THE NEED IS DRAMATIC.

Jack Dunford, Burmese Border Consortium

the UNHCR into the region. We've been pushing for that for a long time. Second, we've worked very hard with the Thai government to ensure the prevention of the forced repatriation of the refugees along the border.

Q • Mr. Dunford, the UNHCR's role in Thailand has changed pretty significantly in the last year. Could you talk a little more about that?

JD • UNHCR's role has changed because they now have a role. But it is a unique role. We believe it's the only place in the world where UNHCR has been given only a protection mandate. They are not involved in the provision of services or the administration of the camps.
We feel this is a good arrangement. During the negotiations last year, the Thai government in effect recognized the good things that the NGOs have been able to achieve over the last 15 years. They've acknowledged that the model of assistance which the NGOs have been able to provide, has worked. They've also acknowledged that the refugees can play an important role in administering their own affairs. So I think from a Thai government perspective, they are the sovereign state, with 25 years experience in looking after refugees. They are responsible for them. They're using the NGOs to help them provide assistance, using the refugees to help them administer the camps, and using UNHCR to help provide security and protection. It's a fairly unique model and I'd say it's working pretty well. It's a credit really to the Thai authorities.

**Q** • Mr. Chandler, you talked earlier about some of the difficulties that have been posed with regard to UNDP and UN agencies operating under the HDI program, such as the extensive mechanisms required for accountability, and "the unforgiving work environment," etcetera. But I'd also like to know if you find there have been benefits to having that program imposed upon the agency and upon NGOs. Has it helped them design better, more creative, more accountable programs, and deliver assistance in a way that perhaps would not have been done if it wasn't for the HDI program?

**DC** • I would like to think it would have been done anyway. But you're right. The scrutiny that we as NGOs have been under and that the UN has been under, in addition to being pushed from the inside by the military government and what they wanted, [created] a very fine line that we were walking. Sometimes there wasn't any room, and sometimes there was just a little bit of room. But I think it created a crucible, where the work that is being done inside the country, and I'm now speaking for the NGOs, is for the most part very high quality. It's good work, and I think that is partly because of the intense scrutiny and the pressure. So on the one hand I'm complaining about it, and on the other hand I'm praising it.

I would ask for a little bit of relief and a little bit of patience, because development—and, development is what I think we should do, though some might not agree on that—development processes take a long time. But I think that the UN clearly has a hard time. It is more focused on measurable objectives—so they know that they've delivered this amount of food and these amounts of toilets and all the rest—and less focused on whether people know how to use the toilets, and whether people are using proper hygiene and all the rest. That's where I think it gets to be dangerous. All I'm asking is a little more patience, forgiveness and balance. But yes, you're right. In some ways I would say that the NGO programs in-country probably stand up, in comparison, better than most NGO programs as a whole, all over the world.
THE STATE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL is making energetic endeavors for ensuring the emergence of a new peaceful, modern and developed nation.

The Government pays serious attention to the proportionate development of all States and Divisions. Accordingly, the education, health, economic, transportation and other affairs of all States and Divisions are developing.

Emphasis has been paid on development of agriculture as our country is an agro-based one. The combined force of the State, the people and the Tatmadaw is collectively striving for the agricultural development.

State Peace and Development Council Chairman Defence Services Commander-in-Chief Senior General Than Shwe gave guidance on national economic development in meeting with national entrepreneurs at the meeting hall of the Southern Command in Toungoo on 10-5-99. The Head of State gave guidance that our national economic strength will improve only when our natural resources including land and water are utilized effectively. In this way, per capita income can also increase, he added.

Myanmar is rich in natural resources and is an agro-based country. As much as we can boost the agricultural output, it will be very beneficial to our country.

Today, the national entrepreneurs are invited to reclaim virgin, fallow, vacant and wetlands for the development of the agriculture sector.

GOLDEN FRUITS FROM LAND IN MYANMAR

Building monasteries and pagodas
Making good things get better
Just look all round here or there, my dear
Things look most encouraging everywhere
All over our country that is Myanmar
Dams, lakes, and canals filled with water
With stalks of crops emerald green
Swaying and dancing in gentle breeze
Golden fruits our land bears in Myanmar
Yielding harvests in abundance crops are
Yields increasing in bumper harvests
Golden crops from valuable land resources
The golden era has come to Myanmar
Unceasingly the people will prosper
Great prosperity the rains are bringing
In the air are golden drums reverberating.

— From the September 26, 1999 issue of The New Light of Myanmar.
To grow paddy and other crops, there remain many virgin, fallow, vacant and wetlands in our country.

In Myanmar, the total cultivated acreage is over 22.5 million acres. There still remain over 22 million acres of virgin, fallow, and vacant lands.

Head of State Senior General Than Shwe has made arrangements for national entrepreneurs to reclaim those virgin, fallow, vacant and wetlands for cultivation of various crops. Moreover, the Head of State himself made field inspection tours of the reclamation sites of wetlands. He urged the private entrepreneurs to strive for the success of work with good attitude towards the country and make endeavors in the interest of the country and the people. He also urged them to set up industries based on the agriculture.

With the assistance rendered by the State, the national entrepreneurs with sufficient capital strength are now engaged in agriculture by reclaiming virgin, fallow, vacant and wetlands in Ayeyawady, Magway, Bago, Taninthayi and Yangon Divisions as well as in Shan State.

Our nation is an agricultural country. Hence, national entrepreneurs are now actively participating in the agricultural production activities. It is very impressive and encouraging to see them turning the conventional manual cultivation into mechanized modern cultivation.

Energetic efforts are being made in all States and Divisions including Kayin State for boosting the agricultural output.

State Peace and Development Council Secretary-3 Lt-Gen Win Myint and party toured Kayin and Mon States recently and discussed matters on the agricultural development.

Secretary-3 Lt-Gen Win Myint arrived Chaungzon Township in Mon State and met with Township authorities, departmental personnel, those of social organizations and USDA members. He discussed that collective efforts must be made for achieving all-around development in building up a new modern and developed nation today. He pointed out that earnest efforts must be made for harmonious development of the agriculture sector and the industrial sector.

During his trip to Kayin and Mon States, Secretary-3 Lt-Gen Win Myint toured Hpa-an, Papun, Mawlamyine, Yay, Chaungzon, Kya-in-Seikkyi and Kawkareik towns.

Only when the respective regions are peaceful and tranquil, development endeavors can be made.

The entire people have known that nowadays the political, economic, and social objectives have been laid down and being implemented with might and main for the emergence of a new peaceful, modern and developed nation. One of the Political Objectives is "National Reconciliation." Accordingly, a peaceful situation has been brought about and some regions have become peaceful. However, there remain some regions which cannot yet fully enjoy the peace. Kayin State cannot yet fully enjoy peace. To ensure Kayin State to enjoy peace fully like other States and Divisions, remnant KNU armed group must be annihilated by the State, the people and the Tatmadaw collectively. Then, regional development can be carried out there.

Kayin State has favorable conditions for cultivating crops. Regional economic development can
be made by earnest efforts of the local people with patriotic spirit. In this way, the region will develop in faster pace and it will contribute towards the national economic development. And our country can keep abreast with the world’s developed nations.

As regards border areas and national races development works, the regional supervision office is open in Hpa-an. Border areas development works are being carried out in Myainggyi-ngu region as well as in Hlaingbwe, Myawady, Kawkareik, Hpapun and Kya-in-Seikkyi Townships. As much as each region is peaceful, development can be brought about.

Regional development of Kayin State is based on agriculture. Paddy and other crops are being cultivated there. In some hilly places, horticulture is being carried out.

Kayin State is favorable for agriculture and livestock breeding. Hence, livestock breeding works there should be extended properly.

In some places which are not suitable for cultivation of paddy and seasonal crops, perennial crops should be grown. Poultry farms should also be established for economic development.

In this way, agriculture, livestock breeding and fishery sectors will develop rapidly. It will contribute surely towards the regional economic development.

The enthusiastic endeavors of the State, the people and the Tatmadaw for developing all States and Divisions will bear fruit certainly.

This article first appeared in the September 12, 1999 issue of The New Light of Myanmar, Burma’s state-controlled daily newspaper.

TO DEVELOP AGRICULTURE AS THE BASE

The Union of Myanmar is an agro-based country. Hence, the national development depends on the agricultural development of the nation. All-out efforts are thus made in the direction of developing the agriculture sector.

One of the Four Economic Objectives laid down by the State is "Development of agriculture as the base and all-round development of other sectors of the economy as well".

Ministry’s three objectives

To develop agriculture sector, the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation has laid down three objectives. The three objectives are:
• to produce surplus paddy;
• to be self-sufficient in edible oil;
• to boost production of beans and pulses and industrial raw material crops.

Five reforms

To meet these targets, the following five reforms are being carried out with might and main.
• extension of arable land;
• adequate supply of water;
• farm mechanization;
• change of cultivation methods; and
• production and utilization of quality seeds.

Six means to obtain water

Adequate water supply is the basic requirement for boosting the production of crops. Hence, six means for exploiting water resources are being applied by the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation. The six means are:
(1) Construction of new dams and reservoirs;
(2) Storage of water flowing from watershed areas;
(3) Renovation of existing dams and reservoirs;
(4) Damming of creeks and rivers when they are in spate;
(5) Pumping water from rivers and creeks; and
(6) Utilization of underground water.

The above appears frequently in The New Light of Myanmar.
The Inquiry
Food is the most basic economic right. Without food there is no life; and from this truism comes a human rights tenet: without sufficient food, people cannot attain the health, happiness and dignity which are their birthright. Food is universal, transcending class, race and creed. Similarly, freedom from hunger is a universal wish native to human experience. The Tribunal notes that this right is not achieved by apportioning "a morsel of food for every hungry mouth," but by guaranteeing food security, a cornerstone of human life which ensures health and vitality for all. By choosing to investigate the right to food, the Tribunal affirms this universality and argues that basic economic rights should supersede politics, underscoring food as a right permitting no compromise and no derogation.

...Studying hunger's political structure, the Tribunal confirms a trend towards militarization throughout Burmese society. Militarization does not simply implicate the Burma army (its part in creating food scarcity is obvious), but more importantly, suggests that authoritarianism, oppression and violence have become ingrained in routine government business. Propaganda superimposes military values—unquestioning conformity, harsh discipline and centralized power—onto Burmese culture until the two fuse together. Militarization orients public policy toward military purposes in opposition to the general population's best interests. In managing the rural economy, the government consistently prefers military needs above farmers' food security. Examples of this preference abound in practices, policies and programs of national administration: arbitrary taxation, paddy procurement, agricultural development, forced labor.
**SCOPE OF INQUIRY**

**The Right to Food**

...AHRC has measured the denial of the right to food in Burma in terms of "food scarcity." This phrase denotes the absence of sufficient food to maintain a healthy and active life. Food scarcity refers to inadequate access to the necessary amount of food as measured in real terms: whether people actually have food to eat. Food may be produced and sold abundantly, but if it is too expensive or not available locally then people will have no food on their tables. It is the opposite of food security. Clinical malnutrition and death from starvation may be extreme effects, but are not required to demonstrate food scarcity. More visible are the social symptoms: poverty, children dropping out of school to work, crime, corruption and other communal or environmental damage created by the desperate search for a reliable food source.

**Rice**

...Rice is the staple crop and staple food, and is the commodity which determines food security or scarcity. Burma’s agricultural economy has weathered four eras of rice production and distribution: feudal, colonial export, nationalized, and post-socialist. Important, none of these historical shifts tells the full story. Because the country is politically and geographically diverse, significant sectors of the agricultural economy remained unaffected by these historical changes. This is particularly true in the distinction between lowland rice production, by which farmers cultivate rice paddies flooded by monsoon rains, and highland swidden agriculture, in which non-irrigated fields are cultivated on hillsides. To generalize: lowland cultivation provides a surplus crop to be sold and traded; growing highland rice generally produces a subsistence crop for local consumption. The four eras of Burma’s agricultural economy generally refer to changes in the production and distribution of lowland paddy.

Feudal agriculture provided a community’s food and whatever tribute was due to the monarch or his local vassal. Generally, the subsistence economy depended on three factors: enough cultivable land, communal labor and a local natural resource base to provide the necessities of life. The "rice tax" due the royal court, its army and small civil service was more or less of a burden depending on proximity to the capital (or feudal lord), total output and the specific demands placed on a farming community.

With colonialism came the rice export economy. Under British administration, vast areas of lower Burma were cleared for export rice production, and by the 1920s Burma became the foremost supplier of rice to the world. In 1939 Burma was still the leader, putting three million tons of rice on the international market that year. Much of it was grown in the Irrawaddy Delta and exported from Rangoon.

Under the socialist regime, which took over in 1962, rice production was nationalized. The government attempted to redistribute productive lands under nationally administered, locally managed collective farming. The general ineffectiveness of this program, combined with the fertility of Burma’s soil, meant that the changes posed little threat to food security, despite population growth from 17 million just after World War II to 24 million in 1962.
In good times and in bad, the government was a major rice consumer. It purchased a percentage of all rice produced at a fixed rate, regardless of most fluctuations in the rice market. As in pre-colonial times, the government procured rice to provision the army and sell at a discount to civil servants. Throughout the shortages of the 1960s, the government maintained its purchase rate of three kyat per kilogram, or almost one-tenth of the going market rate.

Trouble in the rice market triggered the end of the socialist-styled agricultural economy. By 1987 another food crisis loomed, and the government abandoned its strictest controls on the rice market. In August 1997 rice had risen to 15 kyat per kilogram, the highest price since the 1960s. Fearing possible famine, in September the government lifted the ban on harvest-time rice trading, in place since 1962. The market price of rice was cut in half.

The post-socialist era has retained central planning and control of food production. Farmers are still required to sell a percentage of their rice to the government at discount prices. This paddy procurement system is implemented by Myanma Agricultural Produce Trading (MAPT), a state agency which, along with other arms of the bureaucracy, inherited the duty from its socialist predecessor, State Corporation No. 1. MAPT’s national structure reaches down to the village, where it designates paddy land and collects a fixed quota based on land area. This quota rose steadily from 1988 until 1995, when it was fixed at 12 baskets per acre in high rice-producing areas such as Irrawaddy Division. (Reports of quotas set at 15 or even 18 baskets are not unknown.) Around this time the government paid one-third to one-fifth the going market price for rice purchased under the quota system.

An inherent flaw in this system is the government’s quota calculation based on arable land area rather than amount of rice actually planted or harvested. Farmers who work poor land, or for other reasons produce an imperfect crop, are not exempt from the quota. They fulfill their obligation by supplying paddy bought on the market. In these cases, the difference between the relatively high market price and the low government purchase rate results in a net loss for farmers.

Households that fail to fill the quota face a variety of consequences. While arrests and beatings have been reported, more common is the confiscation of paddy land, for redistribution to other farmers more likely to produce. Farmers have also been sent to labor camps to work off their debt. In Irrawaddy Division, local military authorities are said to have ordered no milling of harvested rice for consumption or trade until entire villages filled their quotas. Lastly, farmers have been threatened, scolded and publicly abused by government rice procurers dissatisfied with their quota.

Quota rice is not only used to provision the army and the civil service, but sold on the international market. Since 1988 there has been a renewed emphasis on agricultural production for export. The main strategies are to increase the land area under cultivation, increase productive capacity through a variety of irrigation and agricultural development projects, and license commercial ventures to grow rice for export.

In 1994 the government announced a major new drive to increase rice exports fourfold, but in the first years of its plan it was forced to buy rice at market value to make up for the shortfall of MAPT-procured quota rice. The World Bank estimates that in 1994-95 rice farmers lost about one quarter of their gross income because of MAPT procurement. This mass purchase of an additional three percent of the nation’s rice over and above the quota raised its domestic market value. Following this experience, the government became slightly more cautious in purchasing rice for export. In 1997 government purchase rates rose to almost one half the market price for top-quality rice. A temporary relaxation of the
strictest aspects of the quota rule and a reduction in land confiscation also saw the total amount of rice procured fall by 21% in 1996-97.

...The government has launched agricultural development schemes throughout the country, but especially in the Irrawaddy Delta. The centerpiece is the summer paddy program, in which the traditional single rice crop per year, sown in the rainy season and reaped in the cool season of October-December, is followed by another crop raised and reaped in the hot season. The summer paddy scheme has several elements: development of irrigation systems such as dams and canals, introduction of high yielding hot-season rice strains, and use of new fertilizers, pesticides, and machinery to cope with the technical complications of the new crop.

These tactics have created two new burdens for farmers. The first is the labor needed to build roads, small dams, and irrigation ditches. State-directed, uncompensated labor is common practice in Burma. Farmers who work on these development projects have less time to tend their crops or other subsistence activities. Secondly, the chemical ingredients of the summer rice program are not distributed free to poor farmers, but are sold to them. Farmers who do not buy the necessary materials cannot participate in the program; their unproductive land, officially designated for double-cropping, is reassigned to a more able household.

The socialist-era reassignment of arable land to productive farmers has taken a new twist in the late 1990s: corporate rice farming. In January 1999 the government announced that 200,000 acres of paddy land in the Irrawaddy, Rangoon, and Magwe Divisions had been transferred to nine unnamed entrepreneurs licensed by the government to reclaim "wetlands and vacant, fallow and virgin lands." It further added that "More wetlands and vacant, fallow and virgin lands are being reclaimed to extend cultivation to ensure rice sufficiency for the people" in a campaign to increase wet-season paddy land by two million acres, and summer paddy by an additional four million.²

Recent US Department of Agriculture statistics affirm statements by the Burmese government that in 1998-99 rice export once again drove national farming policy. There was a substantial export increase in 1998; by November, 86,233 metric tons of paddy had been exported, compared to only 15,328 for the whole of 1997. These reports coincide with rising national production targets, to be achieved in part by contracting big parcels of land to entrepreneurs.

Despite efforts to increase rice production, independent reports indicate that in the early 1990s, over 30% of Burma's children were suffering from malnutrition. Furthermore, anecdotal reports from throughout the country confirm that many people simply don't have enough to eat.... Perhaps one million Burmese refugees and migrant workers reside in neighboring Thailand, many reporting food scarcity as their primary reason for flight.

Militarization

The Asian Human Rights Commission has submitted that food scarcity and hunger exist because of militarization. In defining this term, AHRC has distinguished between militarism and militarization, the critical difference being the social and ideological force the latter exerts on the normative life of society:

"Militarization should be understood as the process whereby military values, ideology, and patterns of behavior achieve a dominating influence on the political, social, economic, and external affairs of the State; and as a consequence, the structural, ideological, and behavioral patterns of both the society and the government are "militarized."³
"I saw one family close to utter starvation, the two small children crying from hunger."

**Rise of the Tatmadaw**

Throughout the 1990s the Tatmadaw grew both in size and expenditure. In 1989-90 the army stood at 175,000 men but doubled to 350,000 in 1995-96. In the same period, the civil service increased by only six percent. Indeed, a 1997 estimate put one in every 32 eligible people in the military. The government's target is 475,000 troops—larger than the US army and one of the biggest standing armies in the world. The American Embassy estimated defense spending to be at least half of total government expenditure, at 8-10% of recorded GDP. In 1988-89, the year SLORC formed, Burma spent 1.8 billion kyat on defense, constituting 22.9% of recorded government spending, equivalent to 2.3% of recorded GDP. By comparison, from 1993 to 1996 defense constituted about 40% of government spending. The government reported that in 1995-96 for every kyat spent on development in frontier areas more than 26 kyat went to the Tatmadaw. Beyond this substantial piece of the national budget, the Tatmadaw receives goods and services of uncalculated value:

> The Ministry of Defense receives but does not pay for about one-fifth of Burma's centrally generated electricity. The Defense Ministry also purchases large amounts of fuel far below market prices. In FY 95/96, the Defense ministry purchased at least 12 million gallons of fuel, at about 20 kyat per gallon for diesel and 25 kyat per gallon for gasoline, for which the market prices were about ten times higher. In addition, a substantial share of the GOB's [Government of Burma] declining real expenditures on health is said by health industry experts to be used to provide medical services to military personnel, and is not included in the defense budget. The Defense Ministry also receives large amounts of rice at a steep discount from the market price...4

...The Tribunal will consider food scarcity and the militarization of Burmese society against this background of a prominent and growing army.

**SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE**

**Untold Sorrows: Food and War**

The evidence demonstrates that food scarcity is a national trend which varies according to regional political and economic conditions. Most notable are differences between areas with armed conflict and areas without it. Terminology differentiating these areas is problematic. The government does not use the term "civil war," preferring instead to consider the conflict an insurgency by "illegal armed groups." On the other side, opposition groups see the armed conflict as revolution or even war for independence. It is outside the Tribunal's scope of inquiry to investigate and decide on the conflict's political classification; we are concerned with the relationship between armed conflict and hunger. In keeping with the general trend of the testimony brought before it, the Tribunal uses the terms "civil war zones" and "non-civil war zones," without bias or obligation to any political significance they might connote.

**Food Under Fire**

Remote regions of Burma are exposed to primitive but militarily effective scorched-earth tactics. According to Tatmadaw strategy these are "free-fire" areas [an area to be under a form of military control that allows soldiers to shoot anyone on sight without the need to determine identity], in which all people are suspected of insurgency and are treated as the enemy.
are subjected to indiscriminate executions and a panoply of other human rights abuses, mass destruction of crops and villages and massive population displacement. The Burmese army has devised what is known as the "Four Cuts" strategy to deny rebels (1) food (2) money (3) communication and (4) recruits. In practice, the strategy does not differentiate between combatants and civilians. To begin with, selected areas 40 to 50 miles square are cordoned off for concentrated military operations. The army then orders villages to move to strategic locations under its control. Soldiers may warn that anyone who refuses to move will be treated as an insurgent and can be shot on sight. After the first visit, troops return periodically to confiscate food, destroy crops and paddy and shoot anyone suspected of supporting insurgents.

...According to [one] researcher, Dee Gay Htoo, as the army passes through villages it indiscriminately destroys food. He states that:

*The biggest problem is getting food. Troops have destroyed virtually everything of last year’s crop and now people are trying to plant, but there hasn’t been any rain, so the crops are poor. The suffering is extreme. Most people are living only off bamboo shoots and other roots.*

...Another informant told a similar tale of military abuse in Myawaddy Township, [where] when soldiers came they

ate our pigs and chickens. Anything that they didn’t eat, they killed, and the rice they couldn’t carry away, they set on fire. Day to day, we could still eat, but over a longer time we would surely have starved. Because we couldn’t travel around, we couldn’t work. We always had to follow their orders. My children suffered from diarrhea and malaria. So before my family reached the point of starvation we fled to this refugee camp. If I had stayed in my village I would surely have died. There were still 20 baskets of threshed rice in my barn. I had to leave all that.*

The above evidence comes from Karen State, but conditions are similar in central and southern Shan State. AHRC’s compilation shows that since March 1996, the Tatmadaw has forcibly relocated over 1400 villages through 7000 square miles. Over 300,000 people have been ordered to move at gunpoint into strategic relocation sites. The relocations intensified in 1997 and 1998, with people in new areas forced move, and existing sites forced to relocate yet again. Vast areas of 11 rural townships have become depopulated "free-fire" zones.

Villagers in the relocation sites work as porters, build roads, dig ditches and erect fences at nearby military camps without food or pay. Most of the relocated people are farmers; so all these changes have seriously affected regional food production.

Similar is the situation in Karenni State. The Tribunal heard that large numbers of Karenni farmers currently live displaced. Some have moved to the relocation camps; the majority remain hidden in the jungle; and some have fled to refugee camps in Thailand. Many see no viable option in Burma and migrate to Thailand to live as refugees or illegal migrant workers.

The relocations about two years ago in Karenni State involved 70-80,000 people, entire regions were moved. People had four choices: 1) go to the relocation site, under Burma army control; 2) stay with relatives in town; 3) hide in the forest; 4) cross the border into Thailand, the last resort. The vast majority of people don’t want to come.*

**To Live, to Work, to Eat**

In areas not entirely controlled by the government, we find systematic population displacement and forced labor, arbitrary taxation, extortion and other infringements on basic economic rights.

The Tribunal heard testimony about the typical problem of two or more armies vying for adminis-
trative control. According to a woman from Mon State, military demands piled up with each new regime:

"The village was taxed by KNU for a long time, though there were some benefits, such as schools and clinics. When the Burma army came it also made demands, but if fields were not destroyed then we could pay. But with the advent of DKBA in 1996 food problems have grown."

Similarly, we read evidence of how civilians are caught between insurgents and the government. In 1996, the Tatmadaw announced the following fines and punishments people in southern Burma's Thayet Chaung Township:

- Any village where insurgents fire a gun must relocate within seven days.
- If insurgents attack Tatmadaw territory, all villages through which they passed must move.
- If any Burma army soldiers die in combat, the nearest village must pay compensation of 50,000 kyat for each dead soldier.
- If insurgents take Tatmadaw equipment or food, the nearest village must pay to replace it.
- If Tatmadaw loses guns, the nearest village must pay 15,000 kyat for each.
- Any village where a battle takes place or where insurgent supporters are exposed will be burned to the ground.

Most of Tenasserim Division is a contested area. AHRC has submitted that severe military action since 1997 has displaced much of the rural population....Much of this farming population has either been forcibly relocated or if not, subjected to severe restriction of movement. Many are prohibited from staying overnight in their fields, necessary during the labor-intensive planting and harvesting seasons.

...Adjacent to combat zones, "brown" areas [areas over which government control is incomplete] are a constant source of conscripted labor. The army forces people to work continually, a practice well documented by international organizations.

...Furthermore, porters on duty go hungry, as recounted by this 18-year-old from Kawthaung Township who was forced to carry loads for an army column in 1997:

"All the porters became weak from lack of food. I saw about ten fallen by the way, some were ready to die, rolling around and murmuring. Some had swollen faces and heads. Seeing this I was afraid, since I was weak and could not walk well. I wanted to run but did not know the way, so I carried on even though weak and thin."

**No War, No Peace**

We also heard evidence from beyond the areas of conflict. In Burma's non-civil war zones, failed agriculture policies and persistent demands for cash, goods and labor undermine food security. Witnesses testified to rising prices, falling wages, unbearable taxation and the inability to feed one's family. We divide the evidence into rural and urban areas.

**Trouble in the Rice Bowl**

We heard myriad evidence attesting to hardship in rural Burma created by government agricultural policy, especially regarding production and distribution of lowland paddy.
yielded 60-70 baskets of rice per acre, as long as we used fertilizer.

High taxes and hunger forced some farmers to sell their land. They have to pay the annual quota, which the government buys at 150 kyat per basket. The administration had us build a big dam, and to support this work farm owners paid one more basket per acre annually to the township council. The dam construction began in 1992 and took two years. The water is for the dry season crop. The dam needs maintenance, and if you don’t go you are fined 100 kyat per day.

Government plans to increase rice production included chemical fertilizers and farm machinery as well. Because of corruption, however, farmers did not benefit from these enhancements:

The Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation sells two kinds of fertilizer which farmers can buy on credit at 3,200 kyat per acre. But our township council prefers selling to merchants, leaving farmers with only four bags for ten acres. But when the debts are due, farm owners have to pay the full value, as if they had actually received two bags per acre. We heard that the government sent irrigation pumps, but after the township council received them, all the pumps disappeared.

So, even without insurgency, rural people face local military rule and hunger. The witness described food scarcity in his village:

Taxes and oppression are staring for the village. There’s no time to work, only to pay taxes and do forced labor; many villagers have little food. Some must eat porridge, some only water skimmed off boiled rice, and others only sweet potatoes. To feed the children some adults go without food for one or two days at a time. Even so, children increasingly suffer diarrhea, sore stomachs, and death.

...We read the statement of a 58-year-old widowed farmer from Rangoon Division. This very fertile area had always enjoyed a rice surplus. She related the hardship caused by government policies to increase rice production through irrigation and double cropping. The drive to grow more paddy began with forced labor:

The government made us dam the Ngamoeyeik River then called on us to grow summer paddy. The construction site was 5 miles away, and we walked back and forth every day in the hot season, when it was really stinking hot. Each family in the region had to send people to dig. I heard that one pregnant woman died carrying loads of soil on her head. I had to hoe the ground. The work was enormously tiring. After we went home in the evening, they videotaped the day’s progress. The dam opened in 1995.

The dam now complete, farmers had to adapt to the hastily-planned new crop:

Summer paddy started in 1996. They didn’t give seeds, we had to buy them. I’ll tell you something, they made us buy seeds taken from other farmers. But different strains of rice were all mixed together, one from here, one from there. When we planted we didn’t notice the difference, but they grew at different rates. There were three different kinds of rice, so what can you do about that? You can’t do anything! You would have to harvest one field three different times, which is too much work. Farmers were furious—some destroyed the whole lot and planted beans or sesame, then bought paddy in the market for their quota.

Despite these initial setbacks, the government enforced the summer crop program. Farmers were forced to comply:
Well, by this time most monsoon paddy had been harvested, and people had planted their beans. But with the dam finished everybody had to grow summer rice. They told us we couldn’t grow nuts, we had to grow paddy. Officials from Rangoon, not soldiers, came and ripped up the beans and even unharvested rice. That was just about the last straw. The government said, “We are making you grow summer paddy for you yourselves to eat.” They said monsoon paddy is for government and summer paddy would be for farmers.

We learned that the government forces people to raise crops for export even when they have nothing to eat. We read about this practice, environmental problems and poverty in the Shan State:

Central Shan State around Hsi Paw and Hsen Wi has big paddy plantations. But now days many people have quit farming because the government forces them to raise cash-crops for export. Paddy also is becoming less beneficial for farmers. Agriculture Department officials push new strains of rice unsuited to the soil and cool weather. They also push soybeans and peanuts as cash crops. But peanuts drain fertility, and the soil must be left to regenerate or it will be useless. The government pays less for produce here than in central Burma. For all of these reasons, people are quitting the land.

Hunger in the City
Food scarcity also affects Burma’s cities. The Tribunal heard of high food costs, endemic corruption, forced labor, and dislocated rural villagers drifting into cities in search of work or simply to beg for food.

The cost of food rose steadily through the 1990s. By 1998, most poor families in the capital city could manage only one meal per day, though food security was by no means elusive only to the urban poor. In January 1997 a former office worker from Rangoon reported,

The biggest problem is feeding our families. Nearly everyone in Rangoon is struggling just to eat. Since we need money for other things as well, usually we eat less or eat very simply. This is a general economic condition, not the problem of only poor people. My house, for example, could be called middle-class, but we face the same problems with food as everyone else.12

Poor urbanites earn their food one day at a time:

Sundry workers include petty vendors, tri-shaw drivers, hired laborers, and the like. They earn between 50 to 180 kyat per day, barely sufficient to cover the cost of rice. They purchase only two to three pyi at a time. Agricultural laborers working for the government get only 20 kyat per day, but have the privilege of purchasing 12 pyi of polished rice for only 20 kyat. Sometimes they get afternoon meals free. Most are women and teenage children. Only the combined income of all members in a household enables people to survive.13

FINDINGS
The People’s Tribunal finds that indeed food scarcity is widespread and serious in Burma today. Provisionally, we find Burma to be militarized, and that a causal nexus links militarization to food scarcity.

On the Right to Food
The right to food, as defined by the International Bill of Rights, has been denied to a large but unknown number of people. As explained in the scope of the Tribunal, the right to food invests certain positive obligations in all sovereign states. Burma has never ratified the relevant international legal instruments, but this failure to publicly accede diminishes neither the validity nor the universality of the concepts they represent. In fact, the Government has committed itself to them in its own public statements.

AHRC has listed seven factors causing hunger outside the war zones:

1. PADDY QUOTA
2. AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT
3. LAND CONFISCATION
4. FORCED LABOR
5. ECONOMIC POLICY
6. ARBITRARY FEES
7. INADEQUATE COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICE

BURMA DEBATE FALL 1999
The Right to Work

The evidence consistently and convincingly illustrated that the state prevents people from working to achieve food security. Farmers are prevented from using their land, water, and other natural resources to provide sufficient food. They are not free to choose when, how and what to cultivate. They are not free to devote their own labor to food security. Communities in armed conflict zones are prevented from using their labor, land and natural resources to achieve food security. Farmers in non-conflict zones are compelled to appease the state first, and feed themselves second. Regardless of their own economic well-being, farmers and others are required to provide goods and services to state institutions, especially the army.

Paddy Procurement

Despite its theoretical merits, the paddy quota fails to promote food security. In practice, the government denies rice to the very people who grow it, people who don't have enough to eat. Hungry farmers grow rice, but the State takes it away without otherwise providing for their food security. This is severe injustice.

The paddy quota is inherently unfair, unrealistically and inflexibly assessing how much rice farmers can spare. Furthermore, through this coercive system the government pays little for rice destined to bring high profits in overseas markets, with no commensurate payment to farmers whatsoever. Corruption and quota pressures mean sometimes farmers must sell even more paddy than calculated.

... It appears that this system is a major cause of inflation in Burma's economy. Expensive rice means higher costs for all food, and rural and urban people alike cannot feed themselves adequately. Given the uniform evidence detailing how paddy procurement siphons rice from rural households, and the economic hardship this system creates for farmers, the Tribunal judges it a significant factor in food scarcity.

Forced Labor

Forced labor is a common practice with severe repercussions on household economy and food scarcity. The evidence before the Tribunal from a variety of sources indicates that it is a major drain on Burma's rural economy and a significant cause of food scarcity.

Counter-insurgency

Nowhere does the state deny food more blatantly than in combat zones. The Tribunal finds the counter-insurgency program to have absolutely decimated food security in and around combat zones. The strategy is simple but effective: stop food, funds, recruits and intelligence from reaching insurgents by severing ties between guerrillas and civilians.

- The Army Destroys Food and Crops

Military operations in the civil war zones target the rural food supply. Apparently, the army's justification is that this food, or some portion of it, is in fact being supplied to insurgent forces, and therefore must be withheld. The army does not attempt to distinguish between food intended for civilian consumption and food allegedly destined for the rebels. Instead, the army targets crops which provide the local food supply, in fear that if harvested, this rice would feed guerrillas. Tilling the soil, planting, tending fields, harvesting—all phases of agriculture are subject to attack.

- The Army Displaces Civilians

...The Four Cuts have thus created a phenomenon of internally displaced people (IDPs), living with perpetual food scarcity. The Tribunal finds that the severest cases of food scarcity, including reports of starvation, occur among IDPs made homeless by the military strategy. Furthermore, this sector of Burmese society has the fewest alternatives when facing a food crisis. The army's presence makes travel hazardous, even when people cross the border into Thailand as refugees.

- The Army Relocates Villages

Relocating human settlements is a major element of the strategy, uprooting hundreds of thousands—perhaps millions—of people over the years and in many cases devastating the rural economy. This is coerced, involuntary relocation, enforced by the army.
Typically, a village either receives written order or a visit by military officers, who command it to move. We find that relocation has profound effects on food security. Moving people cuts them off from their land and natural resource base, subsistence farmers' lifeline. The military neither compensates people for these losses nor designates new land.

Furthermore, food is tightly restricted in relocation centers, depending on the army’s perception of insurgent threat and whether rations actually exist. Relocation creates serious long-term food scarcity, rather than seasonal hunger arising from military incursions or heavy taxes at harvest time.

• **The Army Expropriates Cash and Materials**
  Relocated or not, people must provide cash, goods and services to local military authorities. Refugees sometimes cite these unrelenting and excessive demands as reasons why they left. Although witnesses call it taxation, there is no connection to any national revenue or excise department. Quite to the contrary, it is an *ad hoc* practice serving military needs, and individual soldiers’ arbitrary and sometimes capricious demands. Construction materials, food, livestock, liquor and virtually any other items are expropriated or taxed in this way. The army has also made civilians responsible for security by threatening heavy fines for any local rebel activity. The military promises economic ruin for any village tolerating guerrilla action.

**On Militarization**

...Our inquiry assesses militarization as defined in the scope: military ideology, values and social structures pervading and dominating the economic, social and political life of the country. Militarism describes an army pursuing its conventional role with much vigor; militarization describes the pursuit and capture of all society.

...Do the Tribunal’s findings on denial of food indicate militarization of Burma? We find that they do.

**Routine State Functions**

We found two major causes of food scarcity to be paddy procurement and public works projects. Although military involvement should not be necessary for these routine functions of government, both fall under explicit and implicit military control.

In theory, paddy procurement is a contract between farmers and the state. Tax collection is a normal and reasonable state duty. To this end, MAPT and associated agencies have staff and offices throughout the country, performing their duty in cooperation with town and village authorities. Furthermore, the national police force, to the extent that it is separate from the army, deals with violations of tax law. Therefore, there is no apparent institutional need for the army.

Nevertheless, the paddy quota has been militarized through coercive military force. Evidence showed that soldiers took rice from farmers late for the quota and that military officials physically and verbally assaulted farmers for not producing enough paddy for quota. In areas without MAPT officers or where the army must provide for itself, the quota is replaced by arbitrary taxation, levied with impunity and military violence. Unlike rice collected by the government and then redistributed to the army, this tax is consumed locally by the "tax man" himself. Clearly, the military usurps taxation as a routine and legitimate function of government.

**Militarization of Agriculture**

...There has been a militarization of agriculture through continuous preference for military priorities over farmers' needs. The Tribunal finds that buying...
paddy, building dams, increasing production and selling rice on the world market all put military interests above food security. On one hand, these imply development and open-market reform. On the other hand, the hand of reality, they have been a human rights disaster. These policies would not be so uniformly terrible if planned and carried out democratically. The essential problem is that militarization simultaneously depends on farmers and negates their way of life.

Furthermore, promoting rice cultivation makes sense as economic policy, ensuring a homegrown staple diet. The problem is that various development schemes and policies never challenge the assumption that Burma needs to recruit, feed and equip a huge army. This army's simple existence strains the rural economy: recruiting farmers to be soldiers; feeding them with other farmers' rice; and buying materiel with rice export. Agriculture has become the basis for military buildup. Controlling and exploiting agricultural production have therefore become military goals. The military pursues these goals in a spirit of conquest and militarism.

This is militarization, not mere militarism, for two reasons. First, it is a thorough, systematic, and nationwide orientation towards military control of agriculture, replete with violence, intimidation, and military fanfare. Second, and perhaps more telling, is that military structure and ideology take over government, abrogating farmers' self-sufficient way of life....

Military in the Media
Food scarcity also suggests militarization through government's control of state media.... Mainstream opinion is made to reflect goals normally confined to the army.

Every day the state reiterates these goals, which are printed in newspapers, announced on television and repeated at public events. Apart from the Four Political, Four Economic and Four Social Objectives of the State is the People's Desire, a propaganda campaign begun in 1996. The sum of these slogans is supposed to represent the common will. The People's Desire comprises four commitments to safeguarding the nation: 14

Oppose foreign nations interfering in internal affairs of the State.
Crush all internal and external destructive elements as the common enemy.
The government claimed these statements to be the product of mass meetings featuring speeches, patriotic oaths and unanimous ratification of the People's Desire.... The People's Desire is remarkable because it is not supposed to be military propaganda, but a summary of civilian wishes.... Food security, land rights, health care and education, desires that some of Burma's people expressed to the Tribunal, apparently have no place.

State media further confuses the roles of soldier and farmer by continuously reporting on military officials' input to agriculture. Inspecting fields, checking irrigation ditches, making speeches to farmers, reviewing machinery and "leaving necessary instructions" wherever officials go—all are public acts that reinforce the message of army leadership in rural life....

Popular Opinion
Witnesses repeatedly expressed that Burma is dominated by military, and that rights and freedoms they wish for are therefore impossible. People believe Burma is hopelessly militarized, and that military influence forces them into misery. This viewpoint was especially convincing in testimony from refugees, who were not merely opining on politics, but explaining why they left their homes, gave up their land and now live in extreme poverty. The
The military’s predominance is real and pervasive enough to affect people’s most important economic and social decisions. Such statements make three points. First is the perception that military rule is a nationwide reality with serious implications for everybody. The second is that military rule is absolute, leaving no viable alternative other than flight. Not a single witness expressed faith in the justice system or even mentioned Burma’s courts. Lastly, traditional values of rural society have collapsed: the state has turned people against each other. It has replaced trust and cooperation with desperate competition for survival.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on its findings, the Tribunal makes the following recommendations:

1. **On the Urgency of Food Scarcity**
   All parties must recognize the urgency of Burma’s food scarcity before it reaches a crisis. Steps should be taken immediately, in accordance with the recommendations below.

2. **To the Government of the Union of Myanmar**
   Under international law, all States share a fundamental obligation to safeguard the well-being of their people; this obligation includes ensuring the availability of food. The Government of the Union of Myanmar must address widespread food scarcity throughout the country by giving highest priority to food security as a basic human right, and by:
   - guaranteeing the rights of farmers to possess and use arable farmland and agricultural products to achieve food security;
   - guaranteeing that the State will not interfere where people who have been internally displaced attempt to return to their original lands and resume agriculture conducive to food security;
   - guaranteeing that refugees displaced by conflict can return to their original lands and resume agriculture conducive to food security.

3. **To other parties engaged in Burma’s armed conflict**
   All parties whose participation in armed conflict affects civilians’ access to food must recognize that food security is a fundamental right which can never be denied, regardless of political and military circumstances. Where their military action affects the food supply, all armed parties must make protecting and promoting food security among civilians a higher priority than provisioning combatants.

4. **To all civilian individuals, organizations and political parties planning for political change**
   All such parties working towards political change within Burma, as well as those working for change from outside the country, must first recognize the contribution and the importance of farmers to Burma’s past, present and future. Burma is an agrarian society with an economy dependent on subsistence agriculture. All economic policy must address the well-being of farmers—particularly small and subsistence farmers—and protect and promote their fundamental role in feeding the nation by reinforcing their basic rights to land, labor and economic self-determination.

Consequently, all parties working towards political change must emphasize food security as a national issue affecting all people regardless of race, religion, location or political belief. Any program for conflict resolution, political change, democratization or the transition to civilian rule must include economic policies that respect small farmers as the backbone of Burma’s agricultural economy and promote their interests.

5. **To the international community**
   **a. To state governments:**
   The international community must, to fulfill the obligations specified by Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, promote food security, and therefore must:
   - accept the importance of food security as a fundamental human rights issue in Burma;
   - study the nature and all causes of the food scarcity situation, with due recognition of the military’s role in creating food scarcity;
   - exert influence on the Government of Myanmar to recognize that denial of food is a human rights violation of the most serious and fundamental type, and to guarantee and safeguard food security for all people.
b. To THE UNITED NATIONS:
As global promoter of human rights, and as the forum for State governments, the United Nations must in its relationship to Burma strive to realize the principle declared in Article 1 (2) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights:

All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic co-operation, based on the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.

c. To INTERNATIONAL NGOS:
International non-governmental organizations (NGOs) seeking to support peace, conflict resolution, democratization, human rights or development in Burma should recognize the fundamental role economic, social and cultural rights play in promoting popular participation and political and social empowerment. Awareness and attainment of the right to food, land, housing, health care and education are critical to building a free and open society.

6. On the Criminal Implications of Creating Food Scarcity
Through the systematic militarization of Burmese society, the Government of Myanmar is largely responsible for food scarcity. The government may be considered guilty of a crime against humanity, punishable under international law. If the government and other concerned parties fail to reverse this consistent denial of the right to food, it falls within the scope and obligation of international law to investigate.

ENDNOTES
1. For more discussion of food scarcity and related terms, see FAO's The State of Food and Agriculture, and Bread for the World's Eighth Annual Report, cited in the Bibliography (Appendix 7).
4. The American Embassy's statistics are not official but are a compilation of embassy, Myanmar government and World Bank/IMF figures. The embassy's report outlines the flaws inherent in all statistical data on Burma, including a general incompleteness of all data, exchange rate distortion, omission of defense-related imports and overstatement of international debt service payments.
5. See 'A Village Teacher,' Testimony 4, Appendix 4.
6. See the First Witness' deposition.
10. AHRC, p. 132.
13. AHRC, p. 186.
14. As broadcast daily on TV Myanmar.
WASHINGTON, DC – A Burma Roundtable on October 6 featured Priscilla Clapp, U.S. charge d'affaires to Burma. Ms. Clapp shared her insider's perspective on economic and social changes in the country and prospects for Burma's place on the agenda of the international community.


NEW YORK – On September 24, Asia Society and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation presented a speech, 'Myanmar in the Next Millennium' by U Win Aung, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Union of Myanmar, with response by David I. Steinberg, Director of Asian Studies at Georgetown University.

A conference on October 5, entitled "The Role of UN Agencies in Burma and on its Borders" featured representatives of a number of UN agencies, including the offices of the Secretary General, UNICEF, and UNHCR. Other speakers represented NGOs working inside Burma and on its borders, and the U.S. State Department. The conference was hosted by the International Rescue Committee, Church World Service, Burma Project/Open Society Institute, and the Burma/UN Service Office.

The New York Roundtable holds periodic meetings of organizations and individuals interested in Burma. For more information contact the Burma/UN Service Office by phone: (212) 338-0048 or fax: (212) 338-0049.

NEW ENGLAND – Roland Watson, an author of books on adventure travel spoke about his recent stay along the Thai-Burma border at a New England Burma Roundtable dinner on November 19.

The New England Burma Roundtable is an informal group of individuals and organizations working to promote human rights and democracy in Burma. Meetings are held the second Monday of every month. For information contact Simon Billenness of Trillium Asset Management by phone: (617) 423-6655 Ext. 225, fax: (617) 482-6179, or email: sbillenness@trilliuminvest.com.

PHILADELPHIA – The Philadelphia Roundtable hosts a monthly activity. For more information contact Dan Orzech by phone: (610) 650-7755 or email: orzech@well.com.

SEATTLE – September and October meetings of the Burma Interest Group focused on preparations for grassroots activities to coincide with the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Meeting held in Seattle at the end of November.

The Burma Interest Group is a non-partisan forum attended by representatives of NGOs, business, academia, and other interested parties that meets monthly to discuss Burma-related topics. For more information contact Larry Dohrs by phone: (206) 784-5742 or fax: (206) 784-8150.

CANADA – Dr. Cynthia Maung, who operates a clinic on the Thai-Burma border, and Min Ko Naing, a student activist imprisoned in Burma, have been selected as the recipients of the 1999 John Humphrey Freedom Award. The International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development, in conjunction with Canadian Friends of Burma, will host the awards ceremony in Montreal on December 12, with a keynote speech by internationally renowned writer John Ralston Saul.

For more information about this event or Canadian Friends of Burma, contact Corinne Baumgarten by phone: 613-237-8056, fax: 613-563-0017, or email: cfoob@web.net.

LONDON – The Britain Burma Society held a reception on October 5, marking the beginning of its new season, to welcome Chairman John Okell, Deputy Chairman Dr. Daw Tin May Aye, and the council.

On November 4, Dr. Sun Myint, a celebrated Burmese artist, spoke to the BBS on the "History of the Modern Art Movement in Burma" and displayed selections of his paintings.

The Britain Burma Society hosts monthly events in London aiming to encourage cultural and social relations between the two countries. For more information contact Hon. Secretary Derek Brooke-Wavell by phone: (01189) 476874, fax: (01189) 546201, or e-mail: d.wavell@dtn.ntl.com.

On October 16, several Amnesty International groups hosted a Burma Evening in Harrow, England to promote their campaign to free prisoner of conscience U Htwe Myint. For more information contact Owen Davies by phone: (44-181) 866-2893 or e-mail: o.davies@nationwideisp.net.

NETHERLANDS – In September and October, a delegation of Burmese grass-roots workers lobbied in eight European countries for a stronger European Union (EU) economic policy towards Burma. The group, organized by Burma Center Netherlands, met with representatives of foreign affairs ministries, members of parliament, students' unions, and women's organizations in each country.

The Netherlands Burma Roundtable is held once every two months with the goal of updating organizations and individuals on current events and activities surrounding Burma. For more information contact The Burma Center Netherlands by phone: 31-20-671-69-52 or by fax: 31-20-671-35-13.
**STATEMENT BY NATIONAL GOVERNMENT OF ARAKAN**

"All should bear in mind that these 'COMPASSION-STUDENTS' are so determined that they are willing to give their life for the cause." (Oct. 1, 1999-2:00 PM)

The National Government of Arakan (NGA) in exile fully shares our hearts with the compassion-student-activists, who took over the Burmese embassy in Bangkok, for their frustration and disappointment. And our government firmly claims that all of these consequences are taken into account over the regime for its repression and human rights violations for many years.

These compassion-activists have been calling on the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) for more than a decade to enter meaningful dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. But the regime ignored the calls. Instead, the regime increases its pressure over the National League for Democracy (NLD), which won 82 percent of parliamentary seats in the 1990 election. Recently, the SPDC blocked the party headquarter when its members were trying to hold an annual meeting. In addition, the junta put lengthy sentences upon Goldwyn and James Mawdsley after the two activists tried to encourage Burmese people for democracy, and that drew anger from the activists all over the world.

As champions of peaceful negotiator, Thai authorities should solve this problem peacefully, no force and no lethal action should be used, similar to the way that the Thai government handled a peaceful hijack by the two compassion-students a decade ago. It was an internationally recognizable solution, it will work in this situation too.

However, Thailand should know that these are not terrorists who attacked the embassy. This is a group of educated Burmese compassion-students who try to draw the world's attention to the Burma's human rights abuses. So negotiating and submitting to students' demands are the best way to halt the bloodyshed from both sides, while aiming for the embassy's staffs' freedom, by personally involving Thailand's Prime Minister. Use of the force will not be the answer for either side, and it is essential that there is no need to take any human life, and no hero is needed in this sensitive and fragile standoff.

Again, the National Government of Arakan (NGA) is deeply concerned for the students' lives and their well being inside the embassy as we are equally concerned for the hostages.

In conclusion, the SPDC should leave their hands off this standoff and let the Thai government solve it alone. Otherwise, the stable situation is going be worsened. All should bear in mind that these "COMPASSION-STUDENTS" are so determined that they are willing to give their life for the cause.

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**BURMA GUILTY OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ABUSES**

In a report issued by the U.S. Department of State on September 8, 1999, Burma's military regime was cited for numerous violations of the right to religious freedom. The 1999 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom designated Burma, one of only five nations worldwide, as a "country of particular concern," along with China, Iran, Iraq and Sudan. According to the State Department, "In Burma, the Government arrests and imprisons Buddhist monks who promote human and political rights. Security forces destroyed or looted churches, mosques, and Buddhist monasteries in some insurgent ethnic minority areas. In some insurgent Chin ethnic minority areas, security forces used coercive measures to induce Christians to convert to Buddhism."

**US HOUSE AND SENATE MEMBERS TRAVEL TO BURMA**

Senator Richard Shelby, Republican of Alabama and Chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence, visited Burma in August. While there, the Senator met with members of the military government as well as with National League for Democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. In October, members of the US House of Representatives, Congressmen Tom Campbell (R-CA); John Cooksey (R-LA); Eti Faleomavaega (D-AS); and Donald Payne (D-NJ) traveled to Burma to investigate matters regarding the production and trafficking of narcotics and humanitarian assistance and development. These representatives serve on the International Relations Committee.

**STATEMENT BY THE COMMITTEE REPRESENTING THE PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT**

The Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP) was greatly disturbed to learn of the seizure of the Burmese Embassy in Bangkok and the taking of hostages by armed men. We understand from news reports that the men, the "Vigorous Burmese Student Warriors", are demanding the release of political prisoners in Burma and political dialogue between the CRPP and the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) with a view to forming an interim government.

While the CRPP understands the aspirations and frustrations of students and other democracy activists who have been forced to leave Burma by the repressive measures of the military regime, we categorically condemn the seizure of the embassy and the taking of hostages. Such acts are contrary to the principles which the CRPP and the National League for Democracy (NLD) are constantly defending in the name of justice, human rights and peace.

We deeply appreciate the decision of the Thai Government to reject the use of force and applaud the courage and diplomatic skills of the Deputy Foreign Minister. It is our most sincere wish that the situation be resolved peacefully without any casualties. We extend our sympathies to the hostages and their families and hope that they may soon be happily reunited. We who are struggling for democracy in Burma have all too often been arbitrarily separated from friends and family by the harsh measures of the military regime and sympathize greatly with the plight of those whose personal lives are wounded by tyranny and violence.

We would like to draw the attention of the world to the fact that this act of violence at the Burmese Embassy in Bangkok is an effect of the many acts of injustice and cruelty repeatedly perpetrated by the military regime in Burma. Violence breeds violence.

The CRPP and the NLD are confident that democracy will come to Burma through the perseverance and non-violent endeavours of all who love justice, human rights and peace.
TERRORIST ATTACK ON THE MYANMAR EMBASSY IN BANGKOK: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Now that dust has settled over the terrorist attack on the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok last week-end, it is time to review the situation and consider the wider implications of that occurrence for the international community. The denouement of the situation begs the question whether the right message has been sent to those who may be planning to perpetrate similar crimes.

A careful study of the situation reveals that the attack was not launched on the spur of the moment by some misguided youths but planned and carried out by hard-nosed terrorists belonging to the All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF) and the Kayin insurgent groups. It is clear that they were not only able to move without let or hindrance between the Maneeloy refugee camp and Bangkok but were able to acquire assault rifles, pistols, grenades and substantial rounds of ammunition without difficulty. It is also evident that the security guards posted at the Embassy offered little or no resistance to the five terrorists when they approached the main entrance with suspiciously large guitar cases. Had they bothered to search the guitar cases, they could have easily foiled the attempt to seize the Embassy. It is also doubtful that the terrorists conspired to do the job by themselves. Judging from the exuberance displayed by some of the foreigners "taken hostage" and released and the fact that those hostages came out of the Embassy wearing the red head band supplied by the terrorists, it would not be farfetched to assume that the whole episode was orchestrated. When journalists saw that the hostages had bonded with their captors, they described it as bizarre. In reality it may be more accurate to say that there was "esprit de corps" among terrorists and co-conspirators.

Thai authorities led by Deputy Prime Minister, Vichai Ratanaekul, General Chetta Thanajaro and Interior Minister, Sanan Kachornprasart worked professionally to end the hostage situation without bloodshed. Much to their credit they were able to persuade the terrorists to give up their threat to execute one hostage at a time until all their demands were met. Deputy Foreign Minister Sukhumband Paribata displayed uncommon courage by offering himself as a hostage in place of the others and agreeing to take the helicopter trip with the five armed men to the Myanmar border where they were freed. However, notwithstanding the relief felt by everyone that the siege of the Embassy was ended without the loss of a single life, the kid glove treatment of the terrorists by the authorities concerned raises a lot of questions, particularly in the light of statements alleged to have been made by a senior official that the perpetrators are "not terrorists." "They are students who fight for democracy. We have given them safe passage to their own country. We don't consider them to be terrorists. They are student activists". Such irresponsible statements will only encourage terrorists to strike again and erode the international community's efforts to decisively meet the challenge posed by them. Terrorism is a scourge and a terrorist is a terrorist by any name. No one who takes up arms, forcibly enters diplomatic premises and hold diplomats and innocent men, women and children hostage should be allowed to hide behind the banner of student activism. The international community can ill afford to be ambiguous when it comes to meeting the challenge posed by terrorists.

...Countries like the United States which are engaged in a long-term struggle against terrorism acknowledge the importance of dealing firmly with terrorists. Thus the US was quick to condemn, in no uncertain terms, the terrorist attack on the Myanmar Embassy and the taking of hostages in spite of the claims of the terrorists that they were acting on behalf of those aspiring for democracy.

When it concerns terrorism, the international community needs to discard the kid glove in favour of the iron fist.

This statement was issued by the Burmese Embassy in Washington D.C.
MEDIA RESOURCES (CONTINUED)

ASIASOURCE.ORG

Launched by the Asia Society
October 1999

www.asiasource.org

Acts as a filter for the resources on Asia available via the web. Features a daily digest of top news stories and recent commentary, a listing of Asia-related events around the world, a database of Asia specialists, and maps and statistical information (including a guide to business protocol in Asia's major markets and full government directories for each Asian country). A "country comparison" service allows users to compare data between 205 countries at the same time.

MON POLITICAL HISTORY BACKGROUND

By Nai Tun Thein
October 1999

Mon Unity League
Bangkok
For information
email: mul@bkk.a-net.net.th

The 82-year-old author is the chairman of the Mon National Democratic Front. His book provides a historical overview from the time of the Mon Empire to the present, highlighting Mon people's role in the fight for independence from the British and the Japanese, and their struggle for statehood. Also discusses Mon language, literature, culture and economy, and the Mon-Karen and Mon-Thai relationships. Available in Burmese only.

ART OF BURMA: NEW STUDIES

Edited by Donald M. Stadtner
October 1999

Marg Publications
Army 8; Navy Building (3rd Floor)
148, Mahatma Gandhi Rd
Mumbai 400 001
Email: margpub@bom5.vsnl.net.in

A new and broad-ranging perspective on Burmese art, published in India, with 75 color and 50 black-and-white pictures. Top names write on Pyu and Mon art, Pagan bronzes and architecture, cloth paintings, court manuscripts, lacquer, and jewellery, etc.

BUSINESS WATCH

MASSACHUSETTS BURMA LAW GOES TO SUPREME COURT

The U.S. Supreme Court, which hears only 1% of the 10,000 cases that are referred to it each year, announced on November 29 that it would take up the case of the Massachusetts Burma Law. The court will hear arguments in Natsios v. National Foreign Trade Council (NFTC) this spring and is expected to provide its decision by the end of its term in June. The NFTC, which represents U.S. companies involved in foreign trade, originated the case in a 1998 lawsuit against the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The 10th District Court of Massachusetts and then the First U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, ruled that by restricting state purchases from companies that do business with Burma, the law unconstitutionally interferes with the federal government's exclusive power to set foreign policy and regulate foreign commerce.

The result of the Supreme Court case could have far-reaching economic, legal, and humanitarian ramifications, as to whether state and local governments can apply moral standards to spending decisions regarding other countries. At stake are states' rights to decide how to spend public money and consumers' rights to express moral views with their purchasing choices. Twenty-five cities and counties nationwide, as well as the State of Vermont, have enacted measures similar to Massachusetts', which concern not only Burma, but also China, Cuba, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Sudan, Switzerland and Tibet.

BURMA EXPORTING FISH AND GRAIN PRODUCTS TO REGION

As reported by Xinhua News Agency, Government statistical sources cited success in many of Burma's food exports this year. In a 110.32 percent increase over last year, Burma exported 38,700 tons of rice in the first half of this year. In September it completed a shipment of 30,000 tons of pulses and beans to India. Demand and price for the fish varieties hilsa and carp, which come from Rakhine and Bago provinces bordering Bangladesh, are high in the Bangladesh province of Cox Bazaar. The grouper fish from the southern Taninthayi coastal region is popular in Hong Kong restaurants and currently is earning the highest price among exported Burmese fish. According to Burma's Livestock and Fishery Minister, Maung Maung Thein, the fishery sector produces 12.92% of the total GDP.

FIRST FOREIGN COMPANY CONTRACTS WITH BURMA FOR INTERNET LINK

Burma recently established Internet connectivity via Singapore Telecom's Internet Exchange, also known as SingTel. Commercial email service is currently being provided to the private sector in Burma by Eagle IT Company Limited, who will work with SingTel to set up an Internet link in the country. Internet traffic to Burma will now be delivered using a SingTel satellite. Burma joins 20 other countries in the Asia Pacific region accessing the internet with SingTel's services.

BRIEFINGS AND DEVELOPMENTS

UN ENVOY VISITS BURMA

Seeking to promote dialogue and break the political impasse between Burma's military rulers and Burma's pro-democracy forces, Assistant UN Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Alvaro de Soto, conducted a five-day visit to Rangoon from October 14-18. De Soto met with SPDC chief of military intelligence, Lt.-Gen. Khin Nyunt, Foreign Minister Win Aung, and Brigadier General David Abel as well as with members of the National League for Democracy and the party's leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. Accompanying De Soto was a representative of the World Bank to discuss further an initiative posed earlier by the UN and the World Bank that would link Bank assistance to political reform.
Burma Debate is a publication of The Burma Project of the Open Society Institute.

Mary Pack, Editor

THE OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE (OSI) was established in December of 1993 to promote the development of open societies around the world. Toward this goal, the institute engages in a number of regional and country-specific projects relating to education, media, legal reform and human rights. In addition, OSI undertakes advocacy projects aimed at encouraging debate and disseminating information on a range of issues which are insufficiently explored in the public realm. OSI funds projects that promote the exploration of novel approaches to domestic and international problems.

The Burma Project initiates, supports and administers a wide range of programs and activities. Priority is given to programs that promote the well-being and progress of all the people of Burma regardless of race, ethnic background, age or gender.

OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE

George Soros, Chairman

Aryeh Neier, President