

VOICE UP

The newsletter focusing on current issues of empowerment, community participation, and advocacy for women and children from Burma.

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Woman and Child Rights Project

Mon youths make a video to promote the Elimination of Violence against Women



December 18, 2014

WCRP: In efforts to educate the public about violence against women, as well as to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Women's Empowerment Program (WEP) created a 60-minute video in November, 2014.

The female trainees of the WEP made a major contribution to the production of the video, entitled "If You Don't Know (the elimination of violence against women), You Can't Create a Beautiful Family."

The goal of the video project is to educate the community regarding the meaning of 'violence', and to spread awareness that the torture of women is not a tradition, but a crime. The video includes a role-play performed by the female trainees of WEP, and has been shown for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, held on November 25, 2014, as well as on December 10th's Human Rights Day.

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Publisher's Message

While the past year has seen gains in Burma's democratic movement, women and child rights failed to find sufficient support from national interest, allowing abuse and violations of the past to perpetually affect southern Burma's women and children. Women and child rights remain largely unprotected, while their security remains tenuous. As the central government and ethnic groups continue talks for a nationwide ceasefire and eventual peace, women and their voices are excluded from the process, and local communities continue to experience abuse by government forces, non-state armed groups, as well as local abusers. The women and children of southern Burma continue their daily fight for safety from violence, doing so amidst the near lawlessness of Burma's war-torn ethnic regions.

Over the last six months, the Women and Child Rights Project has continued on its mission to monitor and report human rights abuses against women and children in Mon areas and southern Burma, and advocate for the promotion and protection of women and child rights. Women and children continue to be vulnerable to victimization due to prevailing economic, political, and cultural climates. Of specific concern are current economic pressures affecting households throughout Burma's ethnic regions, which has had profound effects on the welfare and safety of women and children.

As Burma's rural ethnic farmers experience increasing difficulty accessing jobs and obtaining work which provides sufficient livelihoods, whether due to land confiscation, the falling price of rubber, or other factors, communities throughout southern Burma have experienced shifts in community demographics, as well as increased psychological pressures within the home due to the pressures of poverty. Southern Burma's Mon communities have seen increasing rates of domestic migration, wherein men from other areas of Burma move into Mon communities. With new men entering the communities, Mon women have reported experiencing increased levels of sexual abuse. Historically, women have been fearful of speaking out about attempted rape or sexual assault because they do not want to shock or bring shame to their family but, in an encouraging trend, women are speaking up and reaching out to their communities for help after experiencing sexual abuse.

Vulnerable women are gaining courage to speak out against sexual abuse due, in large part, to campaigns promoting women's rights and education surrounding sexual and domestic violence. One such campaign, held in December of this year, was the Women Empowerment Program's (WEP) release of an educational video on violence against women, which the project released in coordination with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Through this 60-minute video, which members of the WEP created and produced, the WEP aimed to educate local communities that violence against women is not a cultural tradition, but a crime.

Although the road is still long ahead for the full protection, promotion, and equality of women and child rights in Burma, the country's burgeoning landscape for public discourse, advocacy, and education surrounding these issues is an encouraging and powerful development for Burma's women and children, and their allies. The WCRP will continue to contribute to the actualization of women and child rights through continued and committed monitoring and reporting of human rights abuses against Burma's women and children.

Khaw Zar Residents Live in Fear Future Kidnappings by Unknown Armed Group

October 16, 2014

Fear of potential kidnappings continues to surround residents of Khaw Zar Sub-Township, Ye Township Mon State, as an unknown armed group was spotted near the village on September 30th. As night falls, villagers do not dare travel outside the village, and lock their houses early in the evening.

Prompting the villagers' concern is an event that occurred on September 19th, when an unknown Mon armed group kidnapped five Khaw Zar residents and demanded a ransom of 75 million kyat from the villagers in exchange for the victims' release.

Two hostages were released the next day, while the four remaining victims were not released for nearly a month; the victims were finally returned to their families on October 13th.

Even with Infantry Battalion No. 31 based in the village, Khaw Zar residents do not feel safe, and the village administrator has advised villagers to lock their homes at 7 pm, not to open them any earlier than 5 am.

According to a local Khaw Zar shopkeeper, villagers were "running scared" on September 30th, because they saw the unknown armed group near the village. The group was noticed a few days before the kidnapping occurred.

"The unknown armed group spread the news that they have 18 people remaining on their list to kidnap. The villagers are worried because the unknown armed group did not disclose the names of the potential victims. Our village is heavily distressed because we can't believe in Infantry Battalion No. 31, or the armed group," said a member of a Khaw Zar youth group.

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"We want to send a message to the people that violence (against women) is [an issue] related to everyone, and we must all make a contribution to the elimination of violence (against women). Every single [act of] violence has an effect on everyone," said Mi Hong Sar Htaw, Coordinator of WEP.

The video participants worried that the audience will not understand their message, so they shot the video multiple times to get the best result.

"We had [a] very limited time [allowed] for shooting and editing the video, so we had some flaws in the subtitles; [the project's] budget was also limited. All [of] the participants in the video are amateur [actors], so we worried that the people won't understand the message we [are trying to] send and shot the film multiple times," said project organizer Mi Ah Moo Chan.

The video project has been funded by the Marie Stopes International (MSI) and the United Nations Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

Border Government School Teachers Dissatisfied with their Salaries

October 16, 2014

Government school teachers in Three Pagoda Pass, Kyar Inn Seik Kyi Township, Karen State, argue that officers appointed to provide teachers with security and a sufficient salary are failing to do so.

Teachers on the border find it difficult to live on the salary they are provided, especially since they are not allowed to tutor students outside classroom hours in order to supplement their income, as other districts allow.

A twenty-eight year old primary school teacher states that, "Three Pagoda Pass administrator Myo Naw Zaw always sends letters to the Township Chief of Education to alert him when teachers are absent without leave."

The teacher continues, "We are always smart for the students, [and] we fulfill our duty on the border, [but] not all the teachers' situations are the same. It is fine for single [people] to live on our salary, but it is difficult for a married person. Also,

living on the border, we [teachers] can't find other [sources] of income like the staff from other areas [can]. Some teachers want to move to the town because [there] we can teach Tuition [tutoring sessions], and earn more income. On the border, we can't teach Tuition, and we also have to buy the [book](#) for the student from our own money."

One teacher suggests that the government should provide sufficient support for teachers working in border or rural areas.

Beyond insufficient compensation, there are not enough teachers assigned to each school.

According to local parent Saw Kyaw Tin, 45, from Three Pagoda Pass, "There is not really much time for the [the teachers to spend with the] students in a month. There are normally only two teachers in each school, and the school has a lot of classes, so two teachers are not enough. Normally, there should be around four teachers for these kind of schools, but due to lack of teachers, students are just playing [during class time] and [then] going



back home; they haven't learned very much."

Saw Kyat Tin continued that, "If we compare [our students] with the students in other areas, we can compare them in everything such as education, knowledge, and other things. For my children, I teach them at home, [but] I also need to go to my jobs [so] I can't teach them every day. There is also some weaknesses in [benefits for our teachers] and [more] benefits for teachers from other areas. We also help as much as we can to provide the teacher with accommodations. The security is not very good during this month, but we don't need to worry for our area; the armed group will not give the teachers any trouble."

A member of the village committee evaluated that only 30-45% of area children attend school, while a 28-year-old Karen teacher estimates that the true percentage of students that are able to attend school is lower.



Domestic migration becomes a big challenge for the Mon people

November 14, 2014

Thanbyuzayat and Mudon: Due to rapidly increasing domestic migration and the weakness of the rule of law, social conflicts between the internal immigrants and the indigenous people have been increasing in Mon State, according to a local source.

On August 5, 2010, a case emerged of sexual abuse and violence committed against a woman in Wae Yat Village, Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State. Similarly, on October, 2014, a Burmese immigrant abusively tortured and attempted to sexually abuse a woman while she was working in a rubber plantation in Yaung Daung Village, Mudon Township, Mon State.

On August 5, 2010, U Min Soe, 34, son to U Nyi Lay and Daw Lay Ma, a migrant from Kwin Gyi Village, Ye Tar Shay Township, Pegu Region attempted to sexually assault Mi Pae, 45, daughter to Nai Phoe Thee and Mi Lae, in Wae Yat Village, Thanbyuzayat Township. U Min Soe and Mi Pae had been working together in the rubber plantation when, on August 5, U Min Soe tried to abuse Mi Pae in the workplace. Mi Pae shouted for help and U Min Soe abandoned his violent attempts as people nearby noticed the incident.

U Min Soe has been attempting to abuse Mi Pae since early 2010, the incident on August 5th was his third attempt, according to Mi Pae. U Min Soe is the husband of Mi Pae's younger sister, Mi Tone, and has tried to sexually assault Mi Pae because his wife suffers from a chronic illness.

Although U Min Soe had attempted to sexually assault Mi Pae many times, she never spoke out about the case before, as she did not want to shock her mother, who suffers from heart disease, nor cause stress to her sister, who suffers from a chronic illness, with the bad news.

However, after U Min Soe's second attempt, Mi Pae reported the event to the parents of U Min Soe and Nai Shwe, the village headman of Da Don Chit (Wae Rak) Village. After the report, U Min Soe had to sign an agreement that he would not commit similar abuse in the future.

Despite signing the agreement, U Min Soe continued his attempts to sexually assault Mi Pae and, after his third attempt in November, 2014, Mi Pae revealed the situation to her sister. Soon after, the Moulmein District New Mon State Party (NMSP) arrested and detained U Min Soe.

The case is currently under investigation, and the judgment will be made according to the laws of the NMSP.

In a similar October 2014 crime of sexual assault, Mi Pakao Moe (Mi Pan Wut Yi in Burmese), the 24-year-old daughter of U Tun Myint and Daw San Aye, was hit from behind and sexually abused by a Burmese man in a rubber plantation in Yaung Daung Village, Mudon Township, Mon State.

When Mi Pako Moe was doing her work in the plantation at 10:45 am, she was hit from behind and fell to the ground. Then, the perpetrator caught her waist, choked her neck, closed her mouth and tried to rape her. She struggled hard to escape, and was able to firmly grab one of the perpetrator's legs. The perpetrator said "Release! Release!" in Burmese, and that is when she identified her attacker as Burmese.

After about 15 minutes of struggling, Mi Pakao Moe relaxed all her muscles in efforts to pretend she was dead. When her attacker released her neck and opened her mouth, Mi Pakao Moe shouted for help. When the neighbors from nearby plantations noticed the incident, the man ran away. Mi Pakao Moe was lucky to escape from the sexual abuse as the two neighbors reached her in time.

The neighbors told Mi Pakao Moe, "We saw that man yesterday looking for earth worm. We saw the whole event. We'll give testimony as we saw everything, but we fear that the man will endanger us."

"We don't know who the perpetrator is exactly, so we couldn't report the case to the military base, and we also haven't informed the police as we don't have [money](#). We reported the case to the village headman, but haven't heard anything new," said Mi Pakao Moe.

"We didn't tell the truth when we went to the clinic, because we didn't know how to deal with [the criminal case]. We were just afraid of her dying. If we said the truth, that Mi Pakao Moe's injury was related to the criminal case, the doctor may not treat her injury. In

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Stepmother physically abuses her five-year-old daughter in Three Pagoda Pass Border Town

December 18, 2014

A five year old child has been exposed to systematic beatings from her stepmother in Karen State's Three Pagoda Pass, on the Thai-Burma border, according to a local high school teacher.

The child, Ma Yadanar Soe, is five years old, and attends the first grade at Three Pagoda Pass's Basic Education High School. Ma Yadanar Soe and her eight-year-old brother live with their stepmother, Daw Nge Nge, in U-Daung Kan Ward, Three Pagoda Pass.



The young girl's face is visibly swollen, and her mouth is lined with ulcers due to Daw Nge Nge's repeated strikes with rubber bands. The child will not speak about the abuse in front of her stepmother, however, when she was not in Daw Nge Nge presence, Ma Yadanar Soe stated, "I don't want to live with my [step]mother. I just want to live with my grandmother. My mother beats me with a stick; she struck my mouth with [a] rubber band.

The mother claims that the children are her son and heir, and refuses to allow them to leave her house.

"I have to ask my mom's permission to live with my grandmother. Since she officially

adopted me [as her heir], her permission is a must," said Ma Yadanar Soe's elder brother.

In June, 2014, Ma Yadanar Soe's father signed an agreement with Daw Nge Nge, allowing her to officially adopt the two children. Since the children came into her care, Daw Nge Nge has reportedly beaten them.

A staff member from the Border Health Initiative (BHI) accompanied Ma Yadanar Soe home from school to inquire as to why Daw Nge Nge has beaten the child. The staff member advised Daw Nge Nge she should not beat the child, however, the child continued to be beaten the next day and was kept home from school. Ma Yadanar Soe's elder brother is currently continuing his studies in Grade 1.

"I do not think the mother will send the child to school," said the BHI staff member, "she did not adopt the children because she is kind, she adopted them because she wants to exploit their labor when they grow up. She even blamed the children in front of me; the children were trembling with fear. I suggested that she give her children to a support group if she isn't able to look after them, but Daw Nge Nge did not accept my suggestion."

Daw Nge Nge, 30, previously worked as a sex-worker in Three Pagoda Pass, and now sells goods and alcohol, along with owning and operating a slot machine center. Daw Nge Nge is a widow, and lives with her three-year-old niece and two of her stepchildren – Ma Yadanar Soe and her older brother.

Ma Yadanar Soe's parents, U Shwe Maung and Daw Ei Ei Maw are Burmese Buddhists; the mother died of AIDS in this year, leaving her husband with two sons and two daughters. U Shwe Maung struggles to earn a living as a manual laborer and lives only with his youngest daughter, while sending one of his sons to live with his mother and the two other children to live with Daw Nge Nge; the whole family lives in Three Pagoda Pass. After learning of Daw Nge Nge's actions, the grandmother wants to take her grandchildren to live with her.

Abduction Victims Secretly Flee Their Native Khaw Zar

November 25, 2014

In Khaw Zar Town, Ye Township, Mon State, the victims of a September 19th kidnapping have secretly fled from their native village; some having disappeared without a trace, according to a HURFOM local reporter.

At 7:40 pm on the evening of September 19, 2014, an unknown armed group, reportedly led by Nai Saung and Nai Loon, invaded Ward No. 1 of Khaw Zar and kidnapped U Shwe, the main supporter of the



upper-Khaw Zar monastery, Nai Palai, the main supporter of the lower-Khaw Zar monastery, U Maung Myint, Daw Cherry, and Daw Win Tee. A young mother, Daw Win Thee was released by the group on September 20th, while the remaining four victims were forced to pay 10 million kyat for their release. U Shwe, Nai Palai, U Maung Myint, and Daw Cherry were released by the unknown armed group on October 13, 2014.

Since being released from abduction, the four victims of the September 19th kidnapping have been planning to flee from Khaw Zar Town due to frequent inquiries from the local army unit (Light Infantry Battalion No. 31) and authorities. After their release, the kidnapping victims were forced to endure many restrictions, including having to report to local authorities and

request permission whenever they wanted to travel outside Khaw Zar Town.

According to a local source from the village security unit, Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 31 constantly questioned the kidnapping victims in order to gain detailed information of the armed group, and the amount of money the victims were forced to pay for their release. However, the questions the military asked and the manner in which they approached the victims likely exacerbated the already traumatized mental condition of the victims, according to friends of the victims.

“Since the day of the release, October 13, 2014, the adjutant of the local army unit, LIB No. 31, called Nai Palai to their army base for questioning at least seven times. They asked how much money [Nai Palai’s family] had to pay for his release, and why the victims did not report [the kidnapping] to the army unit.

“They also put a [travel] restriction on Nai Palai in which he has to report to the local army unit and township authority when he goes outside his town. Therefore, Nai Palai has been unhappy and [feeling] stressed. Nai Palai makes his living as a car driver, so the restriction of movement has a huge effect on his work. Nai Palai said the condition was very inconvenient, and he wanted to earn his livelihood peacefully after fleeing from his native home,” said a friend of Nai Palai who lives in Ward No. 1, under the condition of anonymity.

Daw Cherry, another victim of the kidnapping, has already moved to Ye City in order to escape the frequent inquiries by the local army unit and Khaw Zar security group, as well as the movement restrictions. A relative of Daw Cherry explained that since her release, travel restrictions have made it difficult to earn a living and conduct daily activities, and the demand that she make daily reports to LIB No. 31 were too heavy a burden, forcing her to flee Khaw Zar Town.

On October 7, under the condition of anonymity, one of Daw Cherry’s relatives in Khaw Zar explained the challenges that forced Daw Cherry and her family to flee Khaw Zar.

“She [Daw Cherry] was frequently called [by the army] for inquiry. The army asked detailed information about the kidnapping, and the process of paying for her release. They [Daw Chery and her husband Nai Htein Kin, aka Nai Linn] said they knew nothing. They didn’t want to answer those

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A Number of Government School Mon language Teachers Have not Received their Salaries

November 28, 2014

A number of government school Mon language teachers are not being paid their salary. According to an education executive's statement, "[Mon language teachers in] some areas have received salaries from the Ministry of Education, while some [teachers in other] areas have not."

According to a statement from the press service of the upper primary school in Kaw Htaw (Panga, Thanbyuzayat Township), "the news agency falsely stated that the government supports [Mon] teachers' monthly salary. It has been a long time since the education executive has supported Kaw Htaw village [s Mon language teachers]. The education executive supported each Mon language teacher's 30,000 kyat monthly salary during the four months since the school opened."

The Kaw Htaw education executive group worries that other schools will be misinformed about the Kaw Htaw school because the government falsely reported that the government supports Mon teachers' monthly salary; the Kaw Htaw education group has reported the issue to the Guiding Star Newspaper Groups, states the Kaw Htaw education executive.

"I didn't know which ministry supported the salary [for Mon teachers at the Kaw Htaw school]," says Kaw Htaw

upper primary school Mon language teacher Mi San Oo, "I just knew that our school headmaster gave out the salary, so which ministry [provided] it, I don't know."

There are Mon language teachers still waiting for their salaries at Wai Kali high school and Pagha upper primary school. The Wai Kali public service has stated that its high school did not receive any funding from the Ministry of Education for Mon teachers.

According to Waekalee villager (Thanbyuzayat) Nai Tun, "since we got the right to teach Mon language at government schools, we tried and looked for Mon teachers who can teach Mon language, but we have no funds to support their salaries. We do not dare to collect money from the students' parents."

The central government's Ministry of Education has legally agreed to support the 30,000 kyat monthly salaries for ethnic language teachers at government schools for the 2014-2015 school year.

"In government schools teaching Mon language, the headmaster must report to the education headmaster, via the township education board, who will then report to No. 1 Department of Basic Education, and they will give them the money for the salaries. It is my suggestion for every school to report to the ministry that they are concerned," said Dr. Aung Naing Oo, a Mon State Member of Parliament.



Four Khawzar Town Residents Remain Held Hostage by Unknown Armed Group

October 3, 2014

An unknown Mon armed group kidnapped five residents from Khawzar Town, Ye Township, Mon State last Friday, September 19th, and have demanded a 750 thousand kyat ransom for their hostages. The group told relatives of the victims that the hostages will be released once the village pays the demanded sum.

On September 19th, at around 8pm, villagers were preparing for Maha-Dout offerings at the Auk



Monastery in Khawzar Town, when the villagers were kidnapped by the unknown armed group. According to a relative of one of the kidnapped, “around twenty-five members of the [unknown Mon armed] group came to the village, [posing] as villager[s], hid[ing] the gun[s] with them. They already had the name of the [people] that they [were planning to] kidnap.”

Of the five residents taken by the group, Nai Shew, Nai Plai, and Nai Myit were kidnapped at the monastery, while Ma Cherry and Ma Win Tee were taken from their homes. The group took the victims

about one mile from Khawzar Village, and then transported them to their temporary base in Pout Pin Kwin Village. Ma Win Tee, the mother of a young child, was released the next day, while the four remaining victims continue to be held by the group.

The village administrator and relatives of the hostages met with the head monk of the Auk Monastery to request that the funds donated for monastery construction be used to pay the ransom. The monk rejected their request and refused any involvement in the incident.

According to a relative of one of the abducted, the group of relatives reported the incident to the Infantry Battalion No. 31, who responded that they had “already reported it [the incident] to the military.” “If if we do not report [the incident],” they said, “we worry that they will tackle us.”

Military and police from Khawzar Town met with the hostages’ relatives many times since the abduction, but have failed to act. The villagers believe that the military, police, and unknown Mon armed group are affiliated, and working together to demand [money](#) from the villagers.

Currently, the military has taken responsibility for the villagers, but fail to stand guard.

“They ask us to build the hut for the guard, but we did not see them serve their duty,” said a villager from Khawzar Town.

On March 27th, 2014, a Mon splinter group delivered a letter to Khawzar City’s monastery supporters on, demanding the collection of 20 million kyat [money](#) from villagers.

Four separate armed groups are active along southern Ye Township and northern Yebyu Township, led by Nai Saung, Nai Chan Dein, and Nai Lwin, respectively, and have been known to abduct villagers and demand [money](#).

Three-Year-Old Girl Abused and Threatened by Step-Mother



August 18, 2014

WCRP: Three-year-old Ma Ya Ta Nar Phyo was abused and threatened by her step-mother while living in Chaung Zone, Three Pagodas Pass. The Border Health Initiative (BHI) was in Chaung Zone with a mobile clinic when they brought the child to a safe house located in the New Mon State Party-controlled area of Palaing Japan on July 15th.

“I don’t want to take care of this child, but because of my husband, I have to take care [of her]. I want to give this child to other people who want to adopt [her], but her parents died of HIV virus, and no one dare to adopt her due to [worries that the] child may have HIV,” said the child’s step-mother, Daw Sout.

According to a neighbor, “the girl lived with her step-mother in Chaung Zone, Three Pagodas Pass, and she was abused and threatened by her step-mother. [The] step-mother did not provide [enough] food. [The child’s] mother died a year ago with HIV virus, and her father sold vegetables for their livelihood and took care of her. Unfortunately, six months later, her father also died with HIV virus and she [Ma Ya Ta Nar Phyp] had to live with her step-mother.”

When the child arrived at the safe house, she was severely malnourished and did not talk. According to the neighbor, the girl was too afraid of her step-mother, and does not talk.

When Ma Ya Ta Nar Phyo first arrived at the safe house, she showed clear signs of trauma.

According to a staff member from the safe house, “[Ma Ya Ta Nar Phyo] arrived [to] our safe house in the evening. She was crying too much, and did not eat food, did not speak, did not want to live with the people. It showed on her face, she was always scared [of] something. Then she stopped crying in the morning around 4am. After she [was here] three days, she start[ed] talking a bit. Before, we thought that she couldn’t speak, but she can speak both Mon and Burmese languages. We didn’t want her to feel lonely, and [played a] cartoon movie for her, but when she saw the light on the TV she felt scared and was crying. I thought that her step-mother showed something to her on the TV and scared her. But now, she is talking to the other people in the safe house and she also has [a] friend here,” said a staff member from the safe house. Ma Ya Ta Nar Phyo now joins the nursery school located near the safe house.

Three months ago the girl’s step-mother went to a hospital on the Thai-Burma border, on Thai side, to check for HIV, but was not able to have blood drawn due to malnutrition. Doctors advised the step-mother to return for testing in six months.

A child whose mother is HIV positive cannot be tested for HIV until he or she reached 9-18 months; according to staff from the safe house, they will bring Ma Ya Ta Nar Phyo to the hospital in October to receive HIV testing.

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order to get immediate treatment from the doctor, we told him she received her injury falling from a tree. The doctor suspected us, as he saw the injury around her neck, but agreed to provide the treatment. [The doctor] requested not to contact him again if there were judicial inquiries. The doctor provided his best service as we promised we wouldn't contact him next time," said the grandmother of the victim.

In the morning of October 17, 2014, the village administrator, together with the officials from the Township NMSP arrested the perpetrator and detained him at the NMSP Township Office.

Though President Thein Sein's government introduced democratic reform to Burma in 2010, the fundamental rights of the mass population remain unprotected.

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questions because they were worried about their security. Eventually, the couple moved to a ward in Ye City, in the last week of October. They didn't share detailed information of their move with us, but it's sure that they moved [to Ye] because they wanted to avoid military inquiry, the restriction of movement, and to find more security," said the relative.

The decision to flee their home was a difficult one, as Daw Cherry and Nai Htein Lin owned a phone-service shop, an (illegal) money exchange, and a rubber plantation in Khaw Zar Town.

"We have two children who were [in] school in Khaw Zar, and they had to quit their schooling when we moved to Ye. It was such a relief to have relatives in Ye who provided us [with] a plot of land to stay [on]," said Daw Cherry.

"LIB No. 31 is located very near to Khaw Zar, however, instead of investigating the kidnapping, and providing better security to the locals, the army unit has disturbed the victims, applying restrictions on movement and demanding their regular reporting," said Nai Ong Mon (not real name), a youth from Khaw Zar.

"The army unit must provide protection [to the locals]. Now, our region has no guarantee of security. After the kidnapping, worries increased dramatically amongst the villagers; they fear that their time will come. When investigating the victims, the army mainly focused on how much money they paid [the armed groups]. Reportedly, the victims had to pay 40 million kyat, but we don't know the real amount of the payment, as the victims never spoke out.

"It seems that the army really wanted to know the facts. Previously, when the armed group demanded 10 million [kyat from the victims of a kidnapping], the army also demanded the same amount. The army believed that if [the villagers] are able to provide a payment to the rebel group, they are able to pay the army the same amount also. Even if the army unit is based near us, our security is not any better," continued the youth.

According to local residents, the Khaw Zar Police Force and militia group have followed suit, applying travel restrictions, demanding regular reports, and failing to provide any support to the victims.

Regarding the kidnapping, Nai Hongsar, vice-chairman of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) said, "The troops of the NMSP have never been active in that area. The group [who kidnapped the villagers] has been active as a robber gang for a long time. We can't fight and defeat them as they are active in the area [which is] controlled by the government army. The government must take full responsibility."

In 2013, prior to the 100th birthday of the upper-Khaw Zar monastery's abbot, the Mon splinter group led by Nai Soung and Nai Loon demanded 40 million kyat from Khaw Zar rubber and betel nut plantation owners, and other business persons in Khaw Zar, according to local residents. Following the incident, Township Administrator U Kyaw Moe, along with the commander of LIB No. 31, asked the victims about the payment, and extorted money from them as well, according to HURFOM's local reporter.

"This kind of incident takes place frequently in this region, so the existence of the army unit is totally unnecessary. Kidnapping has repeatedly happened in this region, so locals suspect that the army unit [is involved in the kidnapping]," said a local 28-year-old.

Twelve Hnee Padaw Households Face an Uncertain Future as Fire Destroys Their Homes

January 13, 2015

Nearly twelve houses burnt to the ground as a fire ripped through Hnee Padaw Village, Mudon Township around 7pm on January 3rd, resulting in 500-600 million kyats worth of damage and displacement of the families. The fire was ignited when embers fell onto a bed in one of the houses, subsequently spreading through the house and on to surrounding houses.

Twelve families lost all of their property in the fire and now face severe hardship. Victims include individuals over 50 years-old, as well as children who attend grades 10, 9, 7, and 4 at the local school.

The children are still able to attend school, but a number of children report that despair over losing their homes has left them too grief-stricken to continue attending classes. The residents over 50 years-old express concerns over their future as they do not feel strong enough to work.



Before the fire, Aung Lin Oo attended grade 10 with the private education service in Mudon Township, but now reports feeling too depressed to return. Aung Lin Oo expressed that he saw his parents' difficulties resulting from the fire and does not want to attend school anymore. The owner of a private education service has approached Aung Lin Oo's parents with an offer to pay for their son's schooling; the parents stated that they will try to get Aung Lin Oo to attend school, said village administrator Nai Naing.

Hnee Padaw Village residents have joined together to build temporary huts and provide food, clothes, and some money for the victims.

Nai Naing added that, "if people from other villages donate, our villagers can also help them. Currently, we are building a hut for them. I also want to ask help from others for them."

The Shin Saw Pu Association, a Mudon-Township Young Generation Group, provided the families with rice, funds, food, clothes, and a rice cooker. A Mon women's organization and the Women's Empowerment Project also provided donations to the families.

"We collected money from the other office and we went to Hnee Padaw Village on January 6th to donate food and clothes. We feel really sorry for them. It is difficult for them to get back their property in this situation. We worry as to how they will rehabilitate their lives," said a staff member from the Women's Empowerment Project.

A fire destroyed one house in Nee Padaw Village last year. With this recent destruction, the village has experienced 7 fires in recent years, with the greatest destruction resulting from fire spreading to 50 houses in the village.

"We always appreciate feedback from our readers. Please feel free to contact our mailing or email address."

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