

# Poisoned Flowers

The impacts of spiralling drug addiction on Palaung women in Burma

A report by the The Palaung Women's Organisation  
2006



### **The Palaung Women's Organisation**

The Palaung Women's Organisation (PWO) was established on October 14, 2000, in response to the dearth of women actively participating within other Palaung organisations. PWO was formed with the intention of educating and empowering women so that they could develop and strengthen their own self-determination and achieve equality of participation.

PWO provides gender and human rights training to Palaung women and their communities; increases international and community-level knowledge of the Palaung people, their history and cultures; and raises awareness of the human rights abuses suffered by the Palaung people. It has also set up community health projects in Palaung lands.

### **Aims of the PWO**

- To increase Palaung women's educational opportunities in Palaung lands and in exile;
- To promote Palaung literature and culture;
- To participate in the democracy movement by working to restore democracy and human rights in Burma;
- To network with other women's organisations and work together to end the exploitation of women and gain equal rights for women.

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# Foreword

We commend the Palaung Women's Organization (PWO) for publishing this report. It comprehensively shows the effects that Burma's drug problem has on the local population. The interviews conducted with Palaung women, the wives or mothers of drug addicts, show lives torn apart and futures denied by the use of drugs in Burma.

Local Palaung villagers have seen fields once used for tea be replaced by opium so that greater profits can be made. Villagers desperate to earn a living turn to working in opium fields for better wages. Alarming, wages are commonly paid in opium. The increased cultivation of opium has meant an increase in addiction and an increase in suffering among women and children.

Many women already live in dire poverty. Further hardship is caused by the addictions of their spouses and sons. Women are forced to single-handedly support their families, at the cost of their health and the education of their children. The increased financial difficulties and the resulting tension frequently lead to domestic violence. These women are further burdened by cultural taboos that trap them in a vicious cycle of affliction.

The drug problem, and its impacts on women and children, is not only restricted to Palaung areas. Burma's failure to eradicate drugs has brought untold suffering to its people. Despite claims to the contrary, the drug problem in Burma is worsening and has become a threat to stability and peace in the region. The need for the UN Security Council (UNSC) to take immediate and appropriate action to address this is apparent.

The PWO, through this report, have succeeded in creating an avenue for women's voices to be heard and thus fuel the efforts of the international community to help deal with the drug problem in Burma.

We hope that the courage of these women in sharing their stories empowers all efforts to effectively curb the production of drugs. Their strength and desire should serve as encouragement for us to help ease the suffering in Burma faced particularly by women and children.

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Secretary, AIPMC**

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**AIPMC is the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus**

# Map of Area Surveyed by PWO



## Executive Summary

Once renowned throughout Burma as prosperous tea farmers, the Palaung in northern Shan State are increasingly succumbing to high rates of drug addiction. The addiction is devastating Palaung communities, with particularly harsh consequences for women, for whom the addiction of husbands and sons compounds the existing burdens of severe gender discrimination.

*Poisoned Flowers: The impacts of spiralling drug addiction on Palaung women in Burma*, a report by the Palaung Women's Organisation, is based on 88 interviews, mainly with wives of addicts in thirteen villages. The interviews reveal how families are being driven into poverty and destitution by men's addiction. In one village surveyed, almost every adult male had become addicted to opium or heroin, including both fathers and sons.

Contrary to reports by Burma's military regime and the UNODC that drug production in Burma has been drastically reduced in the last decade, this report shows an opposite trend in Palaung areas near Namkham and Mantong. Drug production increased significantly after the ceasefire between the regime and the Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA) in 1991. Local pro-regime militia were given licence to grow and trade in opium in exchange for controlling the local population and sharing profits with the Burma Army.

At the same time, Burmese military controls undermined the tea industry, driving Palaung farmers increasingly to cultivate opium. The growing availability of opium coupled with the lack of future prospects for young Palaung with the loss of their traditional tea-growing livelihood have caused many of them to turn to drugs. Migration to work has also led to addiction, as many have been forced to find work in mining communities in Kachin and Shan State where drug addiction is rife.



Already suffering from traditional gender inequality which dictates complete subordination to their husbands, Palaung women face multiple hardships when their husbands become addicted. Husbands not only stop providing for their families, but sell off property and possessions, go into debt, commit theft, and deal in drugs to pay for their addiction. Subjected to verbal and physical abuse from their husbands, wives must struggle to bear the entire burden of supporting and caring for up to 10 or 11 children in villages with scarce access to health and education services. In one case, a woman lost 8 out of 11 children due to malnutrition and disease, and in another case, two daughters were trafficked by their addicted father.

Wives of addicts have few options as Palaung customary law is highly discriminatory, and divorce, if allowed, means fathers retain custody of children. Most women stated their appreciation of a drug rehabilitation program run by the PSLA, but this was closed down when the PSLA were forced to disarm by the regime on April 29, 2005.

While UN and other agencies are promoting increased support for development programs aimed at drug eradication in Shan State, PWO urges the international community to recognise that the political root causes of the drug problem in Burma need to be addressed if it is to be effectively tackled. These include increased military control over the local economy that has undermined the Palaung tea industry and caused local farmers to turn to opium growing, as well as the regime's policy of allowing local militias to grow opium in exchange for controlling local populations. These root causes can only be addressed by means of genuine political reform in Burma. Meanwhile, PWO urges the donor community to assist drug-affected communities directly by supporting grassroots initiatives, especially focused on women's health, education and capacity development.

PWO therefore makes the following recommendations:

To Burma's military regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC):

- To immediately implement a nationwide ceasefire, withdraw all SPDC troops in ethnic areas, and stop the forced recruitment of militia and soldiers in these areas.
- To immediately begin tripartite dialogue with the National League for Democracy and ethnic leaders.

To the UNODC and other UN agencies implementing programs aimed at eradicating drugs in Shan State:

- To publicly acknowledge that the drug problem in Burma cannot be solved without addressing its political root causes, and to make further support for their programs in Burma conditional on genuine political reform which will enable these root causes to be addressed.
- To carry out any collection and collation of data on opium production in Burma without the involvement of any SPDC officials in order to increase the accuracy of the data.

To donor countries:

- To make funding to agencies implementing drug eradication programs in Burma conditional on the above demands.
- To provide cross-border support to community development programs initiated by grassroots organizations in drug-affected areas that especially address women's health, education, and capacity building.

To the international community:

- To pressure Burma's military regime to begin a process of genuine political reform as the only effective means of addressing the drug problem in Burma.
- To call for the UN Security Council to place Burma on its official agenda.

# Introduction

In recent years, the Burmese military regime and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have been claiming a dramatic reduction in the production of opium in Burma, particularly in northern Shan State. The UNODC stated in March 2005 that Burma's opium cultivation had been reduced by 73% in 8 years, and lauded the efforts of the regime in reducing opium as "substantial and impressive."<sup>1</sup>

For those of us living in Palaung areas of northern Shan State, it is hard to equate such claims with reality. Far from seeing a decrease in opium production, in the last ten years we have seen it spreading to parts of our homelands where poppies had never been grown before. At the same time, we are seeing the scourge of addiction spiralling out of control, with devastating impacts on women and children.

Unfortunately, owing to the regime's strict control of information inside Burma, very little accurate information from opium growing areas reaches the outside world. It is also extremely rare to hear the voices of women from these areas. Thus, we are concerned that local and international agencies formulating programs to address the drug problem in Burma are missing the necessary input of grassroots communities directly impacted by the problem, especially women.

It is therefore the aim of this report to enable the voices of local Palaung women to inform the search for a solution to the growing crisis in their homelands. PWO believes that only by fully understanding problems at the local level, and the various factors leading to these problems, will it be possible to find ways to address them appropriately.

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<sup>1</sup> "Opium crop down sharply says narcotics agency", article in the *Myanmar Times*, March 14-20 2005.

# Methodology

Researchers from the Palaung Women's Organisation (PWO) collected most of the information for this report from December 2004 to February 2005.



Interviews were conducted in 13 Palaung villages in the areas of Namkham and Mantong in northern Shan State. This area was chosen because high rates of addiction had been reported. No interviews were conducted in towns, despite high levels of addiction there, in case this alerted the suspicions of the military regime's authorities. Unauthorized collection of information is strictly forbidden in Burma and punishable by prison or worse.

Interviewers liaised with local Palaung authorities to identify who were addicts in each village, and then requested interviews with wives or mothers of addicts. These women were particularly vulnerable to the impacts of addiction either because of poverty, large numbers of children, or ill health. In some cases, relatives or neighbours of addicts were interviewed.

No real names of people interviewed or their villages have been used in this report in order to protect sources.



## Background





## The Palaung people

The Palaung people are one of many indigenous nationalities within the multi-national Union of Burma. The Palaung population is over one million, and most live in the mountains of the Palaung land in northern Shan State (see map). A large number of Palaung also live in towns throughout southern and eastern Shan State.

The Palaung originate from Mon-Khmer stock. They have a long history and a strong sense of unique identity. They have their own language and literature and a distinctive traditional culture; in the past they also enjoyed their own territory and a self-sufficient economy. The Palaung are predominantly Buddhist; less than ten percent are animist or Christian.

The customary lands of the Palaung people have many ruby and



sapphire mines; minerals such as silver, zinc, gold and aluminium are also found. The Palaung have a long tradition of tea-growing on upland farms, and Palaung tea is famous in Burma for its high quality. The Palaung also grow a variety of temperate climate fruit crops such as apples, plums, avocados and pears, which are highly valued in the lowland areas.

### Status of Palaung women

*“A daughter is like a bag hanging on the wall; She can be removed from the house at any time.”*

- Traditional Palaung saying

Most Palaung women marry young, at the age of 16 or 17, and then move into their husband’s homes. They are expected to do all the household work and take care of their children and husbands, as well as help their husbands work in their farms during the day. Husbands are regarded as the head of the family, and women are expected to respect and obey them at all times. Women are not expected to play any role in the community, except for cooking at festivals, or organizing fund-raising for charity. All community leaders are men.



daughters. If money for education is limited, it is daughters who are withdrawn from school first and are expected to work to support their brother's education.

Palaung customary law also dictates that women cannot divorce without their husband's permission. Even if the husband allows the divorce, the wife is not entitled to any of the family property, and loses custody of the children.

The wage rates in Palaung areas reflect the unequal status of men and women: although men and women do the same work, men are usually paid 700 kyat for a day's work on a tea farm, while women are paid 500 kyat.

Decades of civil war and the continuing militarization of Palaung areas by the Burma Army have led to numerous human rights abuses against Palaung women, including forced relocation, forced labour and sexual violence. However, owing to the isolation of Palaung areas, these cases have seldom been reported to the outside world.

As in other parts of Burma, women in Palaung areas have been obliged to join the regime-sponsored Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation (MWAFF). However, local women report that membership of MWAFF is largely ceremonial and has not led to any improvements in the status of women in their area.

## **Access to health and education**

### *Health*

Many Palaung people have poor access to health care, especially those living in remote hill areas. Only about one in every ten villages has a clinic. Patients have to pay for all medicines, which are sold at a higher price than in the towns. As a result, villagers mostly rely on traditional healers who have no formal medical training.

There are no reproductive health services in rural Palaung areas. Most women give birth at home, without assistance from trained midwives. Despite the fact that books and pamphlets about reproductive health produced by UNICEF are available in towns, these have not been distributed in rural Palaung areas, and few Palaung women know about family planning or have access to contraception. This leads some women to resort to unsafe abortion practices, which involve having traditional birth attendants massage their wombs or insert small sticks in their uterus.



*a young victim of polio*

The fact that most women are unable to practice birth spacing strains the resources of poor families and leads to poor health for both mothers and children. In a community health assessment survey conducted by PWO among 2,694 Palaung villagers in northern Shan State in November 2004, the under-5 mortality rate was found to be 28.5% and the malnutrition rate was 31.2%.

### *Education*

There are few schools in rural Palaung areas. Only one in every three or four villages has a primary school. If students want to continue their education after completing primary school they have to go to another village or town which is often very far from their own. However, many students do not even complete primary school. One reason is that parents are poor and cannot support their children to go to school. Another reason is the distance of the school from their



homes and the lack of transport. The schools are also very small and cannot accept all the children.

Even if children from the rural areas go on to attend high school in towns, they often drop out early as they find it hard to compete with other richer children whose parents can afford private tuition fees. Parents from rural areas also find it hard to afford the rising school fees, and the various other costs such as for books and stationery, sports fees, obligatory “donations” for various ceremonies, computer fees, and uniform fees. They may also simply withdraw their children because they need them to help work at home. As Palaung children often start attending school relatively late, at the age of 10 or 11, they sometimes feel embarrassed at being older than other children, and do not want to stay in school.

## Political history

### *Traditional self-rule*

The Palaung people were traditionally ruled by a hereditary Sawbwa, or Prince, who had his capital in Namhsan Township. During various periods of their history, the Paluang were forced to pay tribute to the Burmese kings. However, they were enjoying a period of independence when the British annexed Shan State in 1886. Even though the Palaung had limited autonomy during the colonial period and during the period of Burma's democratic rule from 1948 to 1962, it was not until the military coup by General Ne Win in 1962 that a serious political and armed movement began in Palaung lands.

### *Formation of the Palaung resistance movement*

After the 1962 coup, the Burma Army committed many injustices against the people, and the Palaung people, along with many other nationalities, took up arms against them. The first Palaung resistance group, the Palaung National Front (PNF), was formed in 1963, at the time when national leaders from different parts of Shan State were being executed or imprisoned. The PNF later merged with the Shan State Army (SSA).

In 1976, Tar Khon Toung, one of the military commanders of the PNF, set up a new group, the Palaung State Liberation Organization (PSLO) and its armed wing, the Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA), which aimed to continue struggling for self-determination for the Palaung people. The 1,000-strong army based itself in the Palaung heartland in the mountains between Namkham, Lashio, and Maymyo. In October 1986, the PSLO was renamed the Palaung State Liberation Party under the chairmanship of Mai Aik Mong. The PSLP cooperated with other ethnic resistance organisations under the National Democratic Front.

During the decades of civil war many Palaung became internally

displaced and struggled to survive in remote areas in the hills. Some fled to take refuge at the China border and in the northern border areas of Thailand.

*PSLA ceasefire with the Burmese military regime*

After the nationwide pro-democracy uprisings in 1988, the Burmese military regime was reorganized under the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). In 1989 the SLORC began a new strategy of negotiating ceasefire agreements with resistance armies. By early 1991, all of the armies in northern Shan State except for the PSLA had reached ceasefire agreements with the regime.

The SLORC then mounted pressure on PSLA to negotiate with them. First, they cut off communications between the PSLA and the Palaung villagers. They forcibly relocated 62 villages in Namkham and 40 villages in Namhsan to sites near towns during the tea-harvesting season. As a result, the villagers could not harvest their tea, and suffered great difficulties from the loss of income. Fearing the situation might worsen, the PSLA were forced to negotiate with SLORC to provide relief to the Palaung people.

They reached a ceasefire agreement in 1991 which entitled the PSLA to continue holding arms and to operate and conduct business in designated areas mainly in Namkham, Namhsan, and Mantong townships of northern Shan State. However, the regime did not ease control over these Palaung areas. On the contrary, it established permanent bases and increased its troop presence there, so that even in Mantong, the PSLA headquarters, the PSLA troops were outnumbered by Burma Army troops.

Throughout the ceasefire period, the Burma Army troops continued to commit human rights abuses against Palaung civilians. Villagers were conscripted for forced labour, their lands were confiscated without compensation for military barracks and business projects,

and the Burma Army troops were able to extort funds, food and property from local people with impunity. The PSLA were generally unable to prevent such abuses, but in some cases would raise complaints with local Burma Army commanders.

Dissatisfaction with the lack of any political settlement in the ceasefire agreement caused some members of the PSLA to form a separate organisation called the Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF), which continued to actively resist the regime. The PSLF was established on the Thai-Burma border in 1992 under the leadership of Chairman Mai Tin Maung.

### *Forced disarming of the PSLA*

During 2005, the SPDC regime began putting pressure on various ceasefire groups in northern Shan State to surrender their arms. Following threats to arrest the PSLA leadership, the PSLA were obliged to officially hand over their arms on 21 April, 2005.

Following the disarming, all PSLA soldiers were demobilized and returned to their homes, leaving villagers in their areas completely under the control of the regime's troops and without recourse for any abuses.

Since the disarming, the Burma Army has begun a strategy of forcing Palaung villagers to be trained as local militia who will be provided with arms to suppress any rebel activity in their areas. For example, every Palaung village in Namsam Township was forced to provide 10 villagers to the regime to be trained as militia. During the period October 2005 to January 2006, over one hundred Palaung youth were given military training and then sent back to their respective villages to serve as pro-SPDC militia. Some of those recruited are also forced to be SPDC soldiers.





## Opium growing in Palaung areas

### *No tradition of growing opium*

Prior to 1962, it was extremely rare for villagers in Palaung areas of northern Shan State to grow opium. Most villagers would grow tea as this was much more profitable than other crops given the high demand from other parts of Burma for Palaung tea.

The outbreak of civil war in Palaung lands following 1962 negatively affected local tea cultivation, as men were regularly conscripted as porters for the Burma Army and many families had to flee their homes and farms during fighting. The instability also hampered trade from their areas to Lower Burma. However, farmers continued to grow tea as their main crop, as the price of tea was still good enough for them to earn a living.



In the past there were also very few opium addicts in Palaung villages. They were most often only elderly men whose supplies would come from opium-growing areas on the China border.

*Increase in opium growing following the 1991 ceasefire*

Several factors caused a major increase in opium growing and trading in Palaung areas following the 1991 ceasefire.

First, the regime allowed ceasefire groups and other pro-regime militia to generate income for themselves in their areas in exchange for remaining quiescent and quelling any rebel activity. Income-generating activities included large-scale natural resource exploitation, such as logging and mining, as well as drugs production. This meant licence to grow and trade opium was granted not only to traditional opium cultivators such as the Kokang and Wa along the Chinese borders, but also to new entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs, many of them Chinese, started opium production in new areas under newly-established militia.

**Opium** is a substance derived by collecting and drying the milky juice in the unripe seed pods of the opium poppy, *Papaver somniferum*. Its chief active ingredient is morphine, which is an addictive drug. Opium exerts effects upon the body ranging from analgesia, or insensitivity to pain, to narcosis, or depressed physiological activity leading to stupor. Addicts become preoccupied with the drug and its acquisition. **Heroin** is produced by a process of refining opium. It is highly addictive and has more severe effects on users as it depresses the central nervous system.

Most addicts in Palaung areas smoke opium and/or heroin. Those who have been addicted for several years, however, turn to injection to get a stronger effect from the drug. This increases the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.

In the Palaung areas south of Namkham, for example, the regime granted special privileges to a local “anti-rebel militia” (“Ta-Ka-Sa-Pha”) led by Pan Say Kyaw Myint, an ethnically Chinese village leader who had helped the Burma Army during its offensives against the Communist Party of Burma in the late 1980s. Kyaw Myint’s anti-rebel militia was allowed to carry arms and control business in and south of Namkham. Initially comprising 70–80 men, by 2006, Kyaw Myint’s militia had swelled to almost 400 armed troops. Although based in ethnically Chinese villages where opium had been grown for years, his militia promoted the growing of opium in other areas under their control, including Palaung villages where little or no opium had been previously grown.

Not only did the regime turn a blind eye to the booming opium production in northern Shan State, but its local military commanders also shared in taxes and profits from the trade reaped by the anti-rebel militia and ceasefire groups.<sup>3</sup> Thus post-ceasefire opium production provided the regime with a double benefit: unpaid armed militia that would quell any rebel activity, and a portion of the lucrative profits, collected as taxes and bribes. Carried out by unchecked armed militia with the approval of the state, opium production surged.

Meanwhile, the cessation of fighting in northern Shan State and open-door trade policies since 1988 meant that trade began to boom across the China–Burma border. The steady flow of logs and other natural resources out to China and commodities into Burma, as well as the mushrooming of boom-towns along the border, provided fertile smuggling and money-laundering opportunities for drug-dealers.

While the investment climate for opium production flourished, farmers

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<sup>3</sup> Kyaw Myint’s militia, for example, were closely linked to the regime’s officers at every level. (Kyaw Myint himself is a close associate of Lieutenant-General Myint Hlaing, until recently the commander of the SPDC’s Northeastern Regional Command, based in Lashio).

in Palaung areas between Namkham and Mantong were finding it increasingly difficult to survive by growing tea. The regime's economic mismanagement of the country had caused spiralling inflation since 1988, but the price of tea remained low (see Decline of the Local Tea Industry below) and many farmers could not even purchase enough rice to survive. With opium buyers ready and waiting, Palaung farmers increasingly began growing opium themselves, or seeking work as wage labourers on opium fields owned by Chinese businessmen, as this could ensure a steady income.

*Attempts by PSLA to deal with drug problem*

By the late 1990s there was a huge increase in the amount of opium being grown as well as traded in certain Palaung areas, despite edicts by the PSLA to villages under their control to curb opium growing.

At the start of 2000, to respond to the increasing addiction problems in Palaung areas, the PSLA set up rehabilitation camps in a number



*PSLA drug rehabilitation camp*

of villages for local drug addicts. They collected the lists of drug users in each village and gathered them at assigned sites, sometimes at temples. The addicts were made to sleep in huts and do community work such as bridge-building while recovering from addiction. The length of stay at the camps would depend on the recovery rate of the addicts. Some stayed for one month, some for up to 4 months. At any one time, 60 addicts would be staying at the different camps.

### *SPDC's War on Drugs leaves militia untouched*

By 2002, the international notoriety of northern Shan State for drug production caused the regime to begin a token drug eradication program in certain areas. The regime's troops issued orders forbidding the growing of opium, and carried out destruction of opium fields in selected areas, including those cultivated by Palaung villagers. However, significantly, most of the areas under Kyaw Myint's anti-rebel militia, except for some of the more visible fields, were left unscathed. Despite Kyaw Myint's notoriety as a drug producer, his networks remained completely untouched. Thus, opium growing continued unabated, and opium remained in plentiful supply in Palaung villages.

### *Situation worsens after disarming of PSLA*

Following the disarming of the PSLA in 2005, drug production has risen. Even though the PSLA had only a limited ability to curb drug growing and trafficking, their presence acted as a deterrent, especially in areas of their control. The removal of PSLA has left these areas without any local controls at all on the growing of and dealing in drugs.

Despite strong community support for the PSLA's rehabilitation camps, they were all forced to shut down after the disarming, as there were no longer any resources or administrative infrastructure to continue running them.

## Growing addiction in Palaung communities

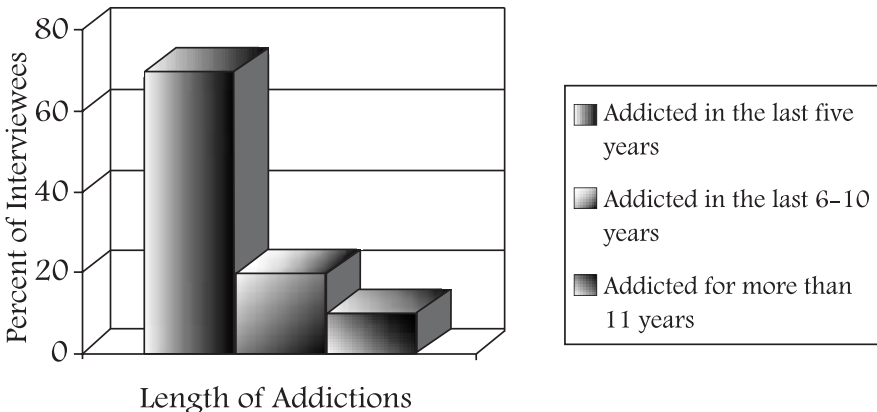


## Increasing Addiction

It is evident from the interviews conducted for this report that addiction levels in Palaung communities have increased significantly in recent years. In one village surveyed (Village D), the number of addicts has gone from about ten to 70 in ten years. Among 50 households and a total population of approximately 300, almost all the adult males in the village are addicted, with each household having one or more addicts in the family.

Of the 68 interviews in which respondents gave information about when their husbands or sons became addicted, 53 (or 70%) said addiction had come about during the past 5 years. The length of addiction in the other cases was from 6–10 years (20%), and between 11–20 years (10%).

As most of the respondents were wives of addicts, and Palaung men tend to marry in their late 20s, most of the information gathered was about men over 30. However, there were proportionally more husbands (66%) in their 30s and 40s who were addicted than husbands in older age ranges. This indicates again that the problem of addiction is growing in Palaung communities.



### **Profile of Interviewees**

PWO interviewed 88 women in ten Palaung villages. 71 were wives of addicts and 8 were mothers of addicts. Of the mothers, 3 also had husbands who were addicted. They were all Palaung Buddhists, except for one woman who was Chinese.

The majority of the women interviewed (66%) were in their 20s or 30s. The rest were mainly in their 40s, with only two over 60.

All of the women interviewed had children. About 80% of them had 3 or more children. Of these, 11 women had between 8 and 11 children. One woman of 26 already had 9 children. One woman had borne eleven children, but only three survived.

None of the women interviewed had received any formal education. All the women gave their occupation as hill farmers, either working on their own farms, or doing wage labour on other people's.

### **Factors leading to the current situation**

Although the addicts themselves were not interviewed about how they became addicted, various factors were mentioned by their wives and mothers as having caused their addiction.

#### ***The decline of the local tea industry***

Before 1962, the Palaung people were known for their quality tea and enjoyed a relatively wealthy status in the region. They built their own tea factories and controlled the trade and sale of their own tea to big towns like Mandalay and Rangoon. The price of food and other goods was balanced with the prices they could get for tea; if a family





*picking tea leaves*

had only one tea farm they could survive for the whole year. If a family had many tea farms they became rich.

As successive military regimes extended their control into ethnic areas, many people started to get poor because their tea factories were occupied by the military. Today the state controls the tea price and collects many taxes. If one wants to start a new tea farm these days, many taxes must be paid. Inflation has caused the prices of most commodities to rise, but tea prices have not risen

accordingly. The SPDC also forces tea farmers to sell a quota of tea to the state. There are SPDC checkpoints at the entrance of towns, and soldiers force people to sell their tea at the gate before they can enter the town.

In addition to controlling the industry and collecting taxes, the SPDC does not provide any support to local tea farmers. In 2001 a landslide destroyed many tea farms in Namhsan Township. The owners of the farms were not given any assistance.

### *Turning to opium growing*

*"We used to have a poppy farm, but there were no advantages to growing opium, because we didn't get any richer, and my husband became addicted to opium. He started to use drugs once we grew poppy." (Interview 73)*



Finding it more and more difficult to make money growing tea, and with poppy buyers ready and waiting, Palaung farmers have increasingly turned to growing opium. Interviews revealed that this is a key factor causing men to begin using and eventually become addicted to opium.



*tending a poppy field*

Many Palaung have turned to working as labourers on other villagers' opium farms. These were mentioned as being mainly Chinese, under the control of militia groups who were given licence to grow by the regime. *"At first, he worked in a Chinese village where opium was grown. Around the village, there are many Chinese villages which are allowed to grow opium every year even though other places are not."* (Interview 54)

It was reported that some employers paid their workers in drugs, thereby also encouraging addiction. *"Sometimes when he went to the farm to work, the boss didn't give him money, and instead just gave him drugs."* (Interview 9)

### *Migration to work*

*"It was after he went away in order to earn a better salary to support his family that he started to use opium."* (Interview 28)

*"Before he never used drugs, but after working in other places and making more money he began using opium."* (Interview 22)

With the inability of local communities to rely on their traditional livelihood as tea-growers, young men have in the past ten years increasingly migrated to work in other areas of Burma. Migration has mainly been to mining areas such as Phakant in Kachin State and Murng Hsu in Shan State. These densely populated mining communities are well-known for drug abuse. The combination of the availability of drugs plus the access to a cash income while away from family responsibilities appears to have caused many Palaung youth to become addicted.

Thus, one woman whose husband had returned from the PSLA rehabilitation camp, and appeared to have stopped drug use, stated that she would not let him work outside their village again.

*“Since he came back from PSLA camp, I don’t dare let him find work in other places because I am afraid that he will use drugs again.”*  
(Interview 76)

### *Opium as medicine*

*“Our village is very far away from town and since we usually don’t have medicine, most of the people just use opium as medicine when they get sick. They use more and more and so later they usually become addicted.”* (Interview 8)

Owing to the lack of health services in the villages surveyed, some local people choose to use the traditional remedy of opium. Several women mentioned that their husbands had become addicted to opium after using it medicinally.

In some cases, women report that their husbands took opium for a particular ailment, such as a stomach pains or a snake-bite, and then got addicted and continued to take the drug even after they had recovered. However, in other cases, women report that their husbands

have chronic illnesses and have to continue taking opium in the absence of other medicine. One man who was forced to be a porter by the Burma Army was beaten so badly that he started to use opium as a pain-killer when he returned home, and then became addicted.

### *A growing culture of drug-taking*

*“If you don’t drink alcohol, you won’t go to heaven.  
If you don’t take opium, you’re not a human being.”*  
– An expression common among Palaung men

The increasing availability of drugs in local Palaung communities, together with growing unemployment and lack of future prospects, have proved a fateful combination for young Palaung men. Despite traditional disapproval of opium addicts, a culture of drug-taking has developed whereby it is perceived as a “manly” activity and peer pressure is exerted accordingly. This pressure can also lead to addiction.



*“My husband has some bad friends who always told him that he didn’t need to care about what I say, and he shouldn’t be afraid of me. They told him that it was fine to take opium and they asked him to taste it. At the beginning his friend didn’t ask for money. He just gave it to my husband freely. Later, after my husband became addicted, he asked my husband to pay.” (Interview 9)*





The Voices of Women

## The Burden of Addicted Men

### *Husbands no longer working for the family*

*“Since he became addicted he also stopped working. Naturally we’re getting poorer and poorer. Before, we still had enough rice and food to eat, but now our situation is desperate.”* (Interview 72)



In almost all the cases of addiction, the men had stopped contributing to the family upkeep. About 25% of the women interviewed said that their husbands or sons had completely stopped working after becoming addicted.

Most of the rest of the women reported that their husbands or sons were still working, but were spending all their wages on drugs.

*“It is very different for us since he started to use drugs. Before, he used to work very hard for our family but since he started to use opium, he has been very lazy about work, and even when he works it is only for money for drugs.”* (Interview 11)

### *Selling off family possessions and property*

*“My husband has been using drugs for 5 years. He sold all of our things, including our cows and rice crops. We have almost nothing left in our house.”* (Interview 72)

Not only did men stop working to support their family, but they began undermining their family's security by using savings and selling off possessions and property, often behind their wives' backs.

*"My husband never thinks about our family's future. He doesn't know what's happening or what we are facing. He's only interested in his drug money. He just wakes up in the morning, goes out, and comes home at midnight. I don't know what he does or where he goes. Sometimes he steals our rice and sells it to cover his drug costs. Before we used to own a tea farm and cows, but not now – he already sold them. We have nothing in our home."* (Interview 37)



### *Borrowing, theft, and drug dealing*

*"He borrowed some money from other people in order to buy drugs and he didn't pay it back. The person who lent money came to my house and demanded it. Sometimes I have to sell our rice to pay my husband's debts."* (Interview 8)

Several wives mentioned that their husbands borrowed money from other villagers to pay for their drugs. Some had also resorted to theft.

*"XX has been using opium for ten years. He has stolen gold, silver, opium, cows, buffalo, horses, dry tea, paddy, and teak. He steals anything that can be sold to buy opium. He was expelled by the head of the village because he is a thief; his house was confiscated and*



*none of his family members were allowed to stay at home.” (Interview 52)*

Some addicts have been caught dealing in drugs, leading to criminal proceedings. This inflicts further financial hardship on their families

:  
*“Once her husband sold opium and the heads of the village caught and arrested him, then sentenced him to jail. His wife sold the house in order to raise funds to bail him out. But it didn’t work and she and her children became homeless. They are ashamed and do not dare return to the village again.” (Interview 54)*



### *Neglect of children*

*“My husband doesn’t help me with the children’s school fees or provide for their basic needs. He just does whatever he wants.” (Interview 37)*

Many wives reported that their husbands had not only stopped supporting their children, but had lost all interest in their welfare.

In some cases neglect of the children has had tragic results:

*“One of our children died because of him (my husband). I went to the farm every day to work for our survival and I asked him to take care of the children at home. Instead he left them alone. They didn’t have anything to eat and one of them got sick and died before I came back home.” (Interview 9)*



## *Rage outbursts and domestic violence*

Many of the women reported that their husbands were prone to outbursts of aggression, particularly when they needed drugs; rage outbursts lead to physical violence towards them and their children.

*“My husband has been using drugs for the past 5 years. It’s difficult for me to stay with him, because he’s abused me both physically and mentally over the years. Even when I was pregnant he beat me. When he needs his drugs fix, he gets mad and he beats me and our children. I always tell him not to use drugs, but he just gets angry with me.”*  
(Interview 75)

## **Impacts on Wives**

### *Struggling as the sole breadwinner*

*“I have to do everything, work in the home, in the forest, and on the farm. I also have my 3 young children to care for, one of whom goes to school. My husband only takes care of himself earning money from his job, while I have to pluck tea and sell it to pay for my child’s schooling.”* (Interview 30)



The greatest problem for the women interviewed is the economic hardship that results from their husband’s addiction. With the husband providing no income, and selling off any available possessions or property, women have to struggle to earn enough to provide for

the family, as well as doing all the childcare and household work.

Women are generally only able to earn money doing unskilled agricultural work, for which they are paid less than men. In some cases, the mothers can barely earn enough to put food on the table, and even then husbands end up selling off the only available food in order to buy drugs.

*“He has been using drugs for the last 2 years. Since then he never helps me to work for our living. He can only afford money for his drugs. He also steals things from our house to sell, especially dried tea leaves and rice. I go and work on other people’s farms every day. I have to take care of my child and also work for our food supplies. My life is just a hand-to-mouth existence, like the Palaung say. Work one day and eat one day. No income is saved. Sometimes my husband even takes rice that we need to cook for the dinner. When he does this, I and my child don’t have dinner to eat so we drink only water and go to sleep.”* (Interview 44)

For some women, the only way they can survive is to rely on their parents, either to look after children while they go to work, to provide food, or to contribute to their children’s schooling.

*“I pay for my children’s school fees and their basic needs. I send all my children to my parents and I go to work every day. My children and I also go to my parent’s house sometimes when we don’t have anything to eat. If I didn’t have my parents to take care of my children I wouldn’t be able to work.”* (Interview 76)

### ***Vulnerability to ill health***

A number of factors combine to make wives of addicts physically vulnerable. Already exhausted by their heavy workload, women have the added problem of having no access to contraception and therefore

continually becoming pregnant. Women have to work throughout their pregnancies, and straight after giving birth. On top of this, they are facing violence from their husbands.

*“Every time I was pregnant I had to work every day right up until the day I gave birth. I have 9 children already and I am now 8 months pregnant. For every one of my children I had to go to work again 7 days after I gave birth. If I didn’t do this, we would not have food to eat. Once, 3 months after I’d given birth, my husband beat me for asking him to look after his children. Another time I had to go washing but after I came back from the washing he hadn’t taken care of the children and had gone out to smoke instead. I complained about this and he beat me.” (Interview 9)*

Not surprisingly, several wives interviewed revealed that they were suffering from ill-health. This had not only caused them to suffer loss of income, but also fall prey to further abuse by their husbands.

*“I used to go and work at our farm every day before I got sick, but since I became ill with malaria, I haven’t been to the farm. My husband is very happy that I am sick and I can’t go to the farm because now he can take all the rice stored at the farm and sell it for his drug fees. He didn’t bring any rice or money home. Once I asked him about that and he just shouted at me. He even took some money that I saved to buy medicine and used it to buy drugs. He also asked other people for money, saying that he needed to*



*suffering from malaria and neglected by addict husband*

*buy medicine for his wife. After he got the money he didn't buy medicine at all, he just bought himself drugs instead. There is nothing left in our home. He took it all and sold it for drugs." (Interview 18)*

Although no women interviewed for this report revealed that they or their husbands had contracted HIV/AIDS, this is clearly a major health risk for wives of addicts, particularly addicts who have travelled to other places to work and shared needles. A villager from Village E described one such case in which a Shan man was an addict with HIV/AIDS but nobody knew it. He married a Palaung woman and died after one month. Later, the girl's parents asked her to marry the dead man's younger brother. After marrying a second time, she also died, and later her second husband also died.

### *Mental stress*

It is evident that the women interviewed were suffering from severe mental stress. Many described feelings of depression, shame and anger, and said they often cried. They had to suffer from constant arguments with their husbands, fear of beatings, and feelings of constant worry about finances and the welfare of their children. On top of this, several women had to face the repeated anguish of losing their children.

*"We had 11 children, but only 3 remain. Because of lack of food and medicine, some of them died as soon as they were born. One of them died in a pond because he didn't know how to swim. Some of them have died at only one or two months. I was very upset about my children and also depressed because of my husband. I have cried and cried and don't know what to do." (Interview 47)*

In one case, a 30-year-old mother of three, whose husband's addiction had caused the loss of their home and all their possessions, ended up losing her sanity, after being constantly shouted at and beaten by her husband. She is now being taken care of by her young daughter, while

her two sons have joined the monkhood to escape their father. (Interview 52)

### *Community rejection*

*“I was very sad and wanted to cry sometimes when other people looked down on me. Some people think that I encourage my husband to use drugs but that is not true. People don’t see my feelings and they don’t understand me.”* (Interview 34)



Another factor contributing to the mental stress of the women is the fact that they experience rejection by the community because of their husband’s addiction. Even though they are working hard to provide for their families, other community members commonly blame them for their husband’s behaviour.

As a result, neighbours are unwilling to help the women, either financially or by helping them find a job.

*“I’m looked down on by our community and my neighbours won’t help me. They don’t like my husband’s behaviour and so they hesitate to deal with me. Before the neighbours used to care and give us help if we needed it but since they found out that my husband was a drug addict they stopped.”* (Interview 1)

One wife of an addict had even chosen to move with her three children out of her village to stay in their hill farm because she did not want to have to face the censure of the people in the village. (Interview 63)

## Impacts on daughters

### *Taken out of school*

*“My husband has been using drugs for 4 years... He didn’t go to work. Before this, 3 of our children went to school, but the eldest daughter had to quit the school and work to support us.” (Interview 68)*

In several cases, mothers were forced to stop sending their children to school when they could no longer afford the school fees, and needed the children to work and contribute to the family income. In these cases, it was usually daughters who were withdrawn first from school as the sons’ education is prioritised.

### *Financial obligation to the father*

Daughters not only have to sacrifice their education because of their fathers’ addiction, but they are also expected and coerced by their father to provide money for his drug habit.

*“Xx’s wife and children try to get him to avoid using opium, but he doesn’t listen to them. Most of his daughters don’t stay at home because they are ashamed of being daughters of a drug addict. Of five daughters, only one stays at home. The rest have left to work elsewhere. The daughter who does stay at home cries and gets depressed because of her father’s behaviour. She works as a seller to support herself and her parents. Not only does she provide food for her father, but she also has to give him money to pay for drugs. One of his other daughters is working as a house-keeper in the town. He often goes to his daughter’s boss and takes all her salary in order to pay for his drugs.” (Interview 50)*

In the same family, one of the sons decided to escape his father by

entering the monkhood. This is not an option which is available to daughters of addicts.

### *Trafficking*

The proximity to the Chinese border and the demand in China for sex workers and wives increases the vulnerability of women in northern Shan State to trafficking.<sup>4</sup> In one case documented in this report, a man sold two of his daughters to a trafficker to earn money for his drug habit.

*“XX has been using opium for 8 years. Many years ago, he was a rich man making his money as a tea trader. Since he became addicted to opium, he has lost his business and his family is very poor. He sold all his tea plantations and everything that could be sold from his house. Once he didn’t have anything to sell, he took his own two daughters and sold them to a female trafficker. The trafficker took the girls, aged 25 and 23, to Ruili City on the China border and sold them to a Chinese man who took them as his wives. Neither of the girls wanted to be his wife, but they had no choice since their father had already taken money from the trafficker.”* (Interview 53)

## Impacts on mothers

### *Double suffering: husbands and sons addicted*

Out of eight mothers of addicts were interviewed, three were also married to addicts. In these cases, the women not only had to face the problems resulting from the addiction of their husbands but had to endure the added anguish of similar abuse from their sons as well.

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<sup>4</sup> See *Driven Away – Trafficking of Kachin women on the China–Burma border*; Kachin Women’s Association – Thailand May 2005.



*“XX, who has to work to feed her family and send her children to school, is burdened by two drug addicts in her family. Both her husband and her son have been addicted to drugs for 7 years. She has pleaded with them to stop while begging them to help her pay for her other children’s education. They both refuse to listen to her and fight back. Sometimes she was beaten by her husband. ... Before her husband and son took drugs, she didn’t worry about the family’s survival, because the two men contributed to the family income. Once both of them started to use drugs, they gave nothing to her and in fact stole from her. They’ve stolen rice, dry tea leaves, and other family things to pay for drugs.” (Interview 33)*

### *Hopes for the future dashed*

*“Children’s development is dependent on the parents. If we can send them to school they will have skills and knowledge, so that they will not use drugs like their father.” Interview 65*

Interviews revealed that many wives of addicts were placing their hopes on their children to become educated and earn a decent living, so that they could avoid the path taken by their father. They were also hoping that their children could contribute to supporting them when they grew elderly. Thus, when sons become addicted, their hopes for the future of their sons as well as themselves are simultaneously dashed.

As one 51-year-old mother, with 8 children, said of her son: *“We want him to quit his addiction. After that, we would like him to help us by working to support our family. If he doesn’t work, and we are getting old, who will feed our family and who will support our daughters’ education? Our family’s future depends on him.” (Interview 6)*



## *Anxiety for sons' welfare*

Mothers of addicts have to suffer not only feelings of frustration and despair at their sons' addiction but also constant maternal anxiety about their welfare. One 68-year-old mother, whose addicted son had run away from home, was clearly distraught at her son's disappearance.

*"XX is my youngest son. He is 18 years old. He ran away when the PSLA soldiers came looking for drug addicts in the village. He was afraid he would have to go to the camp. It is two months already since he ran away. I am very depressed and I have to face many problems because of him. I just want him to be at home so that I will not have to worry about him. I also don't want any bad things to happen to him. . . . Whenever I see someone leaving for other places I ask them to tell him to come back if they see my son." (Interview 10)*

## **Struggling to cope**

### *Placing hopes on rehabilitation despite low recovery rates*

*"We always argue with each other when I ask him to stop using drugs and he replies that he isn't using anymore. Actually he still takes them behind my back." (Interview 66)*

Out of the 88 cases interviewed for this report, only four women mentioned that their husbands had been able to end their drug addiction. However, as husbands commonly denied addiction, wives could not always tell if their husbands had actually given up drugs.

*"Once he told me he'd stopped, but he lied to me. While I thought he'd quit I was very happy so I didn't ask him to go to the farm, I let him stay at home and take care of our children. I soon realized that*

*he was at home smoking opium and neglecting our children.”*  
(Interview 72)

The majority of women interviewed entertained hopes that their husbands or sons could be cured of their addiction. They expressed their strong appreciation of the efforts of PSLA to rehabilitate addicts. As described by a 26-year-old mother of nine, whose husband had been addicted for over ten years:

*“Now he has gone to the PSLA camp for rehabilitation. I am so happy that he is there to cure his habit. I want him to become a good man and to take responsibility for his family’s survival. Instead of staying at home and creating many problems for the family, it is better for him to be in the camp. Sometimes the camp leader forces him to do work, but I am not upset about that. I just hope that once he comes back to the family he will have stopped using drugs.”* (Interview 9)

However, several women expressed doubts that their husbands could be cured, and feared that they would resume their old habits even after treatment. Many women said that if their husbands were not cured, they would send the men back to the PSLA. Others said that if their husbands started taking drugs again, they would leave them.

*“Now he is in the PSLA camp. If he can really avoid drugs, I will think about my children and I will stay with him, but if he can’t stop using opium, I have decided that I will not come back to his house again and I will divorce him. I don’t want to see his face anymore. I really hate to be with him.”* (Interview 18)

### *Obstacles to divorce*

Although many of the women said they longed to divorce their husbands, they were reluctant to do so, as this would involve forfeiting their children as dictated under Palaung customary law.



*“I wanted to divorce him when I was very depressed. I wanted to go to my parents’ home, but I don’t want to leave my 5 children. I am afraid they will be in trouble if they stay behind with him, since one of my children is already dead. According to our traditional village rules, in case of a divorce, the children have to stay with the husband. The wife never has a chance to get the children.” (Interview 34)*

Only in a few cases have women managed to divorce their husbands and take their children with them. One 50-year-old woman clearly had few regrets about her decision to divorce.

*“I have been divorced from my husband for 7 years. I am living with my 5 children. My oldest daughter is 26 and my youngest daughter is only 6 years old. I go and work at a farm and send all my children to school. I try to be a good mother and I also have to try to be their father too. I am in trouble sometimes looking for a job but I can deal with this by myself. I think about the future of my children and I*

*work very hard for them. I didn't get any support from my husband since we divorced. I also didn't hope or wish to get any help from him. Without him we can survive."* (Interview 38)

However, another woman who had divorced her husband, and taken her young son away with her, lived in fear of her husband coming to reclaim her son.

*"One thing I am afraid of and worried about is one of our Palaung traditional rules. When husband and wife get divorced all the children automatically belong solely to the husband, not the wife. Until now, he hasn't come and said anything to us, but when my son is grown I am afraid that he will take him from my heart. But I have to obey the rule."* (Interview 45)

Another woman who had divorced her husband for one year and was managing by relying on her parents and other relatives, reported that it was hard for her to bear the social stigma of being a divorced woman. *"Being alone is very difficult; many people look down on me."* (Interview 46)

The same stigma is shared by widowed women. One former widow with 10 children remarried to escape this stigma and then found herself married to a drug addict. She preferred to remain married to him rather than be looked down as a widow again.

*"XX is my second husband. I was a widow before I married him. I married again because I didn't want to be looked down on by other men. Being a widow is very difficult in our society. I was also hoping he would help me support my children. In fact he turned out to be a bad husband. I didn't get any help from him. He is using drugs and has become addicted. Our living standards become lower and we are getting poorer. ... I was so upset about it because I made the wrong decision in marrying him. One of my children had to quit school in*

*order to help me with my work. My children also suggested that I divorce him but I don't want to be a widow again.” (Interview 41)*

### *Temptation to take drugs*

While there are still very few women who have become addicted to drugs in Palaung villages, it should be noted that women also mention feeling tempted to take drugs to escape their hardships.

*“When I am angry with my husband I also want to use drugs like him so that we will be the same and we will not fight each other. But I have to think about my children and have decided I will never use drugs.” (Interview 58)*

Ironically, some of the women married to addicts mention that they have been forced to find work on opium fields to support their families. This increases the risk that they too may become addicted to drugs.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

It is evident that increasing drug addiction is having a devastating impact on women and children in Palaung communities in northern Shan State. Husbands are no longer providing for their families, and are selling off possessions and property, going into debt, committing theft, and dealing in drugs to pay for their addiction, driving their families into poverty and destitution. Wives face multiple burdens, struggling as poorly paid agricultural workers to support large numbers of children in villages where health and education services are scarce, and prevented by discriminatory customary law from exercising their right to divorce.

Community addiction recovery programs are urgently needed for drug addicts as well as programs that focus on women's health, education, and capacity development. At the same time, the root causes of the drug problem must be understood and addressed if the problems of drug addiction are to be effectively tackled. These root causes include increased military controls over the local economy that have undermined the Palaung tea industry and caused local farmers to turn to opium growing as well as the regime's policy of allowing local militias to grow opium in exchange for controlling local populations and sharing drug profits with the Burma Army. These root causes can only be addressed by means of genuine political reform in Burma.

The Palaung Women's Organisation therefore makes the following recommendations:

To Burma's military regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC):

- To immediately implement a nationwide ceasefire, withdraw all SPDC troops in ethnic areas, and stop the forced recruitment of militia and soldiers in these areas.

- To immediately begin tripartite dialogue with the National League for Democracy and ethnic leaders.

To the UNODC and other UN agencies implementing programs aimed at eradicating drugs in Shan State:

- To publicly acknowledge that the drug problem in Burma cannot be solved without addressing its political root causes, and to make further support for their programs in Burma conditional on genuine political reform which will enable these root causes to be addressed.
- To carry out any collection and collation of data on opium production in Burma without the involvement of any SPDC officials in order to increase the accuracy of the data.

To donor countries:

- To make funding to agencies implementing drug eradication programs in Burma conditional on the above demands.
- To provide cross-border support to community development programs initiated by grassroots organizations in drug-affected areas that especially address women's health, education, and capacity building.

To the international community:

- To pressure Burma's military regime to begin a process of genuine political reform as the only effective means of addressing the drug problem in Burma.
- To call for the UN Security Council to place Burma on its official agenda.

**Appendix 1:** Women interviewed, or described in interviews, for this report

| Interview | Village | Age | Number of children | Relation to addict |
|-----------|---------|-----|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1         | A       | 40  | 9                  | Wife               |
| 2         | A       | 21  | 3                  | Wife               |
| 3         | A       | 38  | 4                  | Wife               |
| 4         | A       | 22  | 2                  | Wife               |
| 5         | B       | 30  | 4                  | Wife               |
| 6         | B       | 51  | 8                  | Mother             |
| 7         | B       | 28  | 6                  | Wife               |
| 8         | B       | 31  | 5                  | Wife               |
| 9         | B       | 26  | 9                  | Wife               |
| 10        | B       | 68  | 4                  | Mother             |
| 11        | B       | 35  | 5                  | Wife               |
| 12        | B       | 31  | 3                  | Wife               |
| 13        | B       | 25  | 3                  | Wife               |
| 14        | B       | 30  | 4                  | Wife               |
| 15        | B       | 35  | 6                  | Wife               |
| 16        | B       | 23  | 1                  | Wife               |
| 17        | B       | 22  | 2                  | Wife               |
| 18        | B       | 28  | 3                  | Wife               |
| 19        | C       | 45  | 3                  | Wife               |
| 20        | C       | 40  | 3                  | Wife               |
| 21        | C       | 37  | 2                  | Wife               |
| 22        | C       | 40  | 6                  | Wife               |
| 23        | C       | 30  | 4                  | Wife               |
| 24        | C       | 30  | 2                  | Wife               |
| 25        | C       | 49  | 4                  | Wife               |
| 26        | C       | 50  | 3                  | Mother             |
| 27        | C       | 23  | 1                  | Wife               |
| 28        | C       | 25  | 3                  | Wife               |



| Interview | Village | Age  | Number of children | Relation to addict |
|-----------|---------|------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 29        | C       | 32   | 2                  | Wife               |
| 30        | C       | 30   | 3                  | Wife               |
| 31        | C       | 40   | 1                  | Wife and Mother    |
| 32        | C       | 28   | 4                  | Wife               |
| 33        | C       | 45   | 6                  | Wife and Mother    |
| 34        | D       | n.a. | 5                  | Wife               |
| 35        | D       | 41   | 11                 | Wife               |
| 36        | D       | 40   | 3                  | Wife               |
| 37        | D       | 30   | 5                  | Wife               |
| 38        | D       | 50   | 5                  | Ex-wife            |
| 39        | D       | 37   | 3                  | Wife               |
| 40        | D       | 24   | 3                  | Wife               |
| 41        | D       | 45   | 10                 | Wife               |
| 42        | D       | 40   | 9                  | Wife               |
| 43        | D       | 39   | 3                  | Wife               |
| 44        | D       | 25   | 1                  | Wife               |
| 45        | D       | 25   | 1                  | Ex-wife            |
| 46        | D       | 35   | 1                  | Ex-wife            |
| 47        | D       | 50   | 3                  | Wife               |
| 48        | D       | 43   | 3                  | Wife               |
| 49        | D       | 54   | 6                  | Wife               |
| 50        | E       | 50   | 8                  | Wife and Mother    |
| 51        | E       | 40   | 4                  | Wife               |
| 52        | E       | 30   | 3                  | Wife               |
| 53        | E       | 40   | 9                  | Wife               |
| 54        | E       | 37   | 4                  | Wife               |
| 55        | F       | 35   | 3                  | Wife               |
| 56        | F       | 40   | 9                  | Wife               |
| 57        | F       | 30   | 3                  | Wife               |
| 58        | F       | 40   | 3                  | Wife               |

| Interview | Village | Age  | Number of children | Relation to addict |
|-----------|---------|------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 59        | F       | 50   | 6                  | Wife               |
| 60        | G       | n.a. | 6                  | Wife               |
| 61        | G       | 30   | 6                  | Wife               |
| 62        | G       | 40   | 6                  | Wife               |
| 63        | G       | 35   | 3                  | Wife               |
| 64        | G       | 30   | 3                  | Wife               |
| 65        | H       | 25   | 2                  | Wife               |
| 66        | H       | 30   | 3                  | Wife               |
| 67        | H       | 30   | 5                  | Wife               |
| 68        | H       | 25   | 5                  | Wife               |
| 69        | H       | n.a. | 5                  | Mother             |
| 70        | H       | 30   | 3                  | Wife               |
| 71        | I       | 35   | 4                  | Wife               |
| 72        | I       | 34   | 5                  | Wife               |
| 73        | I       | 26   | 2                  | Wife               |
| 74        | I       | 29   | 4                  | Ex-wife            |
| 75        | I       | 50   | 9                  | Wife               |
| 76        | J       | 30   | 5                  | Wife               |
| 77        | J       | 60   | n.a.               | Mother             |
| 78        | J       | 28   | 5                  | Wife               |
| 79        | J       | 30   | 1                  | Wife               |
| 80        | K       | 28   | 3                  | Wife               |
| 81        | K       | 30   | 3                  | Wife               |
| 82        | L       | 40   | 6                  | Wife               |
| 83        | L       | 40   | 2                  | Wife               |
| 84        | L       | 20   | 3                  | Wife               |
| 85        | L       | 30   | 2                  | Wife               |
| 86        | M       | 25   | 4                  | Wife               |
| 87        | M       | 39   | 3                  | Wife               |
| 88        | M       | 40   | 9                  | Wife               |

## Appendix 2: Selected testimony

### Interview No. 9

|                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Age              | 26                |
| Occupation       | Hill farmer       |
| Formal Education | None              |
| Sex              | F                 |
| No of children   | 9                 |
| Religion         | Buddhist          |
| Ethnicity        | Palaung           |
| Date             | 22 December, 2004 |

I don't want my husband to use drugs. In the past, whenever I asked him to avoid it he shouted at me and he also beat me. Every time I was pregnant I had to work every day right up until the day I gave birth. I have 9 children already and I am now 8 months pregnant. For every one of my children, I had to go to work again 7 days after I gave birth. If I didn't do this we would not have food to eat. Once, 3 months after giving birth, my husband beat me for asking him to look after his children. Another time, I had to go washing but after I came back from the washing he hadn't taken care of the children and had gone out and used drugs instead. I complained about this and he beat me.

One of our children died because of him. I went to the farm every day to work for our survival and I asked him to take care of our children at home. He didn't look after the children and left them alone instead. They didn't have anything to eat and one of them got sick and died before I came back home. If he had taken care my child would not have died and he would have gotten better, but my husband didn't care about his children.

He also took our rice and sold it to buy drugs. Sometimes we don't

have anything to eat and my children become weak because there is no food. This year my husband left home for 4 months and didn't come back and help me. I have to work alone to feed my children. Also my children and I were sick and didn't have food or health care. I don't want to become pregnant again and have another baby because my husband will not take care of us and I'm afraid that the baby might die. However I don't have any money to buy the contraceptive medicine. If I have money I plan to buy it and take it. Some people have asked to adopt some of my children but my husband didn't agree to this. At the same time he also didn't care about his children. I don't understand his mind.

I was oppressed mentally and physically, I didn't want to be with him anymore and once I even left home. I came back home again because I was afraid for the lives of my children. The children don't like him because he always forces them to do things and shouts at them. They're afraid of him and they don't want to stay with him either.

My husband has been using drugs for more than 10 years. He started to use drugs after our eldest son was born, and has been using until now. He has some bad friends who always told him that he didn't need to care about what I say, and he shouldn't be afraid of me. They told him that it was fine to take opium and they asked him to taste it. At the beginning, one of his friends didn't ask for the money for the drug. He just gave it to my husband freely. Later, after my husband became addicted, he asked my husband to pay. My husband believed what his friend said and became addicted.

My husband only works to have money for drugs. Sometimes when he went to the farm to work, the boss didn't give him money, and instead just gave him drugs. He never brings his money back home. Since I married him I have never gone back to my parent's house. I heard that my mother passed away but I didn't have a chance to go and see her funeral. I was very sad about that.

My husband has never been able to stop using drugs. Now he has gone to the PSLA camp for rehabilitation. I am so happy that he is there to cure his habit. I want him to become a good man and to take responsibility for his family's survival. Instead of staying at home and creating many problems for the family it is better for him to be in the camp. Sometimes the camp leader forces him to do work but I am not upset about that. I just hope that once he comes back to the family he will have stopped using drugs. We are very poor and we don't have our own farm; I just work as a labourer to feed my children. I want him to think about that as well as about his children's future. If he comes back and still uses opium, I will divorce him or I will transfer him to PSLA again.

**Interview No. 18**

|                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Age              | 28                |
| Occupation       | Hill farmer       |
| Formal Education | None              |
| Sex              | F                 |
| No of children   | 3                 |
| Religion         | Buddhist          |
| Ethnicity        | Palaung           |
| Date             | 22 December, 2004 |

My husband has been using drugs for a long time but I only found out about it two years ago. I am now sick with malaria and I have to stay with my parents temporarily. My husband is in the PSLA camp to cure his drug habit. There is nobody to take care of my children and me if we stay in our home. Actually, even when my husband is at home with our family he doesn't take care of us. He just does whatever he wants to do. He doesn't provide any money to support the family. Before he used to work very hard for our family but since he became addicted, he works only to buy opium.

I always asked him to avoid drugs but he just shouted back at me. We always fought together because of that. He always has money for drugs but he doesn't have any money to buy my medicine or food to feed the family. Once when I asked for money to buy medicine, he told me that he didn't have money but offered to steal some money and give it to me. I told him that I didn't want stolen money and he told me never to ask for money from him again.

Sometimes we don't have enough food to eat. He is very selfish and he doesn't think about our family's survival. He is only concerned with his drug fees. I have to take all my children to stay at my parent's house so that we will have food to eat and also health care. I am a sick person and my husband is a drug addict. There is nobody to take responsibility for our children except their grandparents.

We have one small hill farm, I used to go and work in our farm every day before I got sick but since I became ill with malaria, I haven't been to the farm. My husband is very happy that I am sick and I can't go to the farm because now he can take all the rice stored at the farm and sell it for his drug fees. He didn't send any rice or money home. Once I asked him about that and he just shouted at me. He even took some money that I intended to buy medicine with, and used it to buy drugs. He also asked other people for money by saying that he needed to buy medicine for his wife. After he got the money he didn't buy medicine at all, he just bought himself drugs instead. There is nothing left in our home. He took it all and sold it for his drugs.

I wanted to divorce him but he didn't agree and he said he would not divorce. Now he is in the PSLA camp. If he really can avoid drugs, I will think about my children and I will stay with him but if he can't stop using opium, I have decided that I will not come back to his house again and I will divorce him. I don't want to see his face anymore. I really hate to be with him. He didn't listen to me and didn't

care about our family. Some evenings he didn't even return home to us.

I have had problems with my health and also with taking care of my children. I have to face many problems with the physical and mental effects of this. My situation also makes my parents very unhappy for me. Actually I don't want them to be sad because of me but I have no choice, but to let them know and I have to rely on them. Being the wife of a drug addict is very difficult and I don't want it anymore.

### Interview No. 41

|                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Age              | 45                |
| Occupation       | Hill farmer       |
| Formal Education | None              |
| Sex              | F                 |
| No of children   | 10                |
| Religion         | Buddhist          |
| Ethnicity        | Palaung           |
| Date             | 20 December, 2004 |

I have married twice. XX is my second husband. I was a widow before I married him. The reason I married was I didn't want to be looked down on by other men. Being a widow is very difficult in our society. I was also hoping that he will help me to support my children in terms of continuing their education and also maintain a high living standard. When I decided to marry him, my children didn't want me to get married again but I didn't listen to them.

In fact, he turned out to be a bad husband. I didn't get any help from him. He is using drugs and has become a drug addict. Our living standards become lower and we are getting poorer. We have debts to pay to other people. We still have our own farm but it is only small. He is working only for his drug costs. He doesn't help me with anything. I

was so upset about it because I made a wrong decision in marrying him. One of my children had to quit school in order to help me with work. My children also suggested to me to divorce him but I don't want to be a widow again. I was stuck in between my husband and my children. He also said he would avoid opium if I promised not to leave him alone. My children also said they don't want to be with him because he is a drug addict and they were looked down on by other people. I was crying and unhappy all the time. I want him to be a good man and help me to work so that my children will be happy staying with him and they will like him later. He is now in the PSLA camp.

#### Interview No. 50

|                  |               |
|------------------|---------------|
| Age              | 50            |
| Occupation       | Hill farmer   |
| Formal Education | None          |
| Sex              | F             |
| No of children   | 8             |
| Religion         | Buddhist      |
| Ethnicity        | Palaung       |
| Date             | 11 July, 2005 |

XX (the husband) is not only using opium, but he is also selling and trading it. He has been using drugs for 20 years. Once, dismissed by the head of his village, he was forbidden from going back there. However, after all of his children went to the head villagers and persuaded them to change their minds, he was allowed to return. The children agreed to pay a fine of 50,000 kyat in order to allow their father to come back. Back in the village, XX continued to take drugs. XX's eldest son is now also using drugs.

XX's wife and his children beg him to avoid using opium, but he doesn't listen to them. Most of his daughters don't stay at home, because



they were ashamed of being the daughters of a drug addict. Of five daughters, only one stays at home; the rest have left to work elsewhere. The daughter that stays at home cries and gets depressed because of her father's behaviour. She works as a seller to support herself and her parents. Not only does she provide food for her father, but she also has to give him money to pay for drugs.

One of his other daughters is working as a house-keeper in the town. He often goes to his daughter's boss and takes all her salary in order to pay for his drugs. He also steals things, including rice, from his family and sells it to pay for drugs. Hence, his wife no longer stores valuable things at home; instead she hides it in other people houses. As a result of their father's addiction, most of his daughters don't want to return home. One of his sons went to the temple and decided to become a novice monk, because he didn't want to stay at home anymore. His wife also doesn't want to stay with him anymore, but when she thinks about her children she is reluctant to leave. XX's addiction has brought a great deal of distress to the whole family.

Most of the family's children didn't have the opportunity to go to school. Of his eight children only one of them attended high school. It was her aunt that supported her. Because of their father's addiction, and the general lack of education amongst their children, the family's economic status and potential for improving it are low. Before they used to have a tea and rice farm, but their father sold it to fund his drug habit.

### Interview No. 53

|                |                   |
|----------------|-------------------|
| Age            | 40 (now deceased) |
| Education      | No                |
| Sex            | F                 |
| No of children | 9                 |
| Religion       | Buddhist          |
| Nationality    | Palaung           |
| Date           | 12 July, 2005     |

XX (the husband) has been using opium for 8 years. Many years ago he was a rich man, making his money as a tea trader. Since he became addicted to opium through an acquaintance, he has lost his business, and as a result his family is very poor. He used to own tea plantations, but he has since sold them all. In fact, he sold everything that could be sold from his house. Once he didn't have anything to sell, he took his own two daughters and sold them to a female trafficker. The trafficker took the girls, aged 25 and 23, to Ruili City on the China border and sold them to a Chinese man who took them as his wives. Neither of the girls wanted to be his wife, but they had no choice since their father had already taken money from the trafficker.

As a result of XX selling their daughters, his wife became very depressed, developed cancer and died. XX is now living with his eldest son, who also became addicted to opium whilst staying in a Chinese village in the Palaung area. He worked there everyday to earn money to get opium. Some of his children left in order to work as labourers in other places, while some of his sons went to the temple and became monks. Three of the youngest children have remained in the village. Of the three children, the eldest, aged 13-14, has to go to work every day in order to feed his two younger siblings. If they don't have food to eat they are forced to beg for food on the street. Most of XX's children didn't attend school. XX's behaviour has caused the death of his wife and mental and physical pain to his children.

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### **Abbreviations used in the report**

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| MWAF   | Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation       |
| NDF    | National Democratic Front                |
| PNF    | Palaung National Front                   |
| PSLA   | Palaung State Liberation Army            |
| PSLF   | Palaung State Liberation Front           |
| PSLO   | Palaung State Liberation Organisation    |
| PSLP   | Palaung State Liberation Party           |
| PWO    | Palaung Women's Organisation             |
| PYNG   | Palaung Youth Network Group              |
| SLORC  | State Law and Order Restoration Council  |
| SPDC   | State Peace and Development Council      |
| UNODC  | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund           |

The kyat is the Burmese currency.