

BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007  
**CHAPTER 4**

**LANDMINES**

*“The Burma Army is making extensive use of landmines in villages, homes and trails in order to make the area unlivable for the population.”*

- *A Campaign for Brutality*, FBR, May 2007



## 4.1 Introduction

Antipersonnel landmines continued to be deployed in significant numbers in Burma during 2007, despite a growing international consensus that the use of landmines is unacceptable and that their use should be unconditionally ceased. As of mid-August 2007, 155 countries, or 80 percent of the world's nations were State Parties to the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (also known as and henceforth referred to as the 'Mine Ban Treaty'), leaving only 40 countries outside the treaty.<sup>1</sup> Such widespread support of the Mine Ban Treaty recognises that landmines often kill indiscriminately, and in doing so, pose an unacceptable level of risk to civilian and non-combatant populations. According to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the *"Mine Ban Treaty has made the new use of antipersonnel mines, especially by governments, a rare phenomenon"*. However, the ICBL concedes that Burma is one of only two countries (along with Russia) which represents the exception to the *"near-universal stigmatization of the use of antipersonnel mines"*, and that the most extensive deployment of antipersonnel landmines by *"government forces"* during 2007 occurred in Burma.<sup>2</sup> A report released in September 2007 speculated that as many as two million landmines were buried in Burma, with the vast majority of these deployed in the ethnic minority territories bordering neighbouring countries.<sup>3</sup>

Landmines often remain a threat long after hostilities have come to an end or moved out of the area, inflicting injuries even in situations that outwardly appear peaceful. The continued use of these devices constitutes a violation of several key tenets of international law, and a lack of respect for the human rights obligations incumbent on all parties in the Burmese armed conflict.

The armed forces of Burma's current ruling military junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), are responsible for the vast majority of landmines deployed throughout the country. Patterns discerned from the deployment of landmines by SPDC armed forces strongly suggest that, at the very least, there is a failure on the part of the State to ensure that care is taken to prevent or even minimise any harm coming to civilians. Indeed, it seems apparent that the use of landmines in Burma by the SPDC and their allies is typically carried out in a manner that strongly suggests that civilian populations are the primary targets of deployed mines.

Landmines are frequently deployed in areas where a high risk of civilian contact exists, such as along trails and paths, in and around civilian villages and in their fields and plantations. Compounding the problem is that mined areas are rarely signposted, causing disproportionate and indiscriminate damage to the civilian population in these areas.

Landmines are frequently deployed within villages and fields, often to force the villagers out of the area as well as to intimidate those villagers who have fled from returning. The deliberate targeting of civilians in such a way violates several human rights obligations long established as customary international law. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are particularly vulnerable to landmines in that they must regularly move from place to place and in doing so increase the probability of stepping on a hidden mine. SPDC army units have heavily mined border areas, targeting the thousands of IDPs hiding in the forests as well as those seeking to flee to neighbouring countries as refugees. The ICBL reported that mine use during 2007 occurred throughout eastern Burma in Karen, Karenni (Kayah), and Shan States as well as in Tenasserim (Tanintharyi) Division.<sup>4</sup>

Landmines are also deployed by many of Burma's Non-State Actors (NSAs), both those in opposition to the SPDC as well as those who have signed ceasefire deals with the regime and are now allied with them. Many of these groups still continue to operate in the ethnic

minority territories. (For more information, see Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights). Those groups identified by the ICBL as deploying landmines in Burma during 2007 include the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the Karenni Army (KA), the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), and remnants of the defunct Mong Tai Army (MTA). According to the ICBL, it is “likely” that the KNLA deployed more landmines than any other NSA operating in Burma during this period.<sup>5</sup>

Not all NSAs operating in Burma, however, continued to use landmines in 2007. On 16 April 2007, the Lahu Democratic Front (LDF), the Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF) and the Pa’O People’s Liberation Organization (PPLO) all signed the Geneva Call Deed of Commitment renouncing the use of antipersonnel landmines. All three of these groups have areas of operation in Shan State and all three are members of the anti-regime alliance, the National Democratic Front (NDF). Four of the eight organizations which comprise the NDF are now signatories to the Deed.<sup>6</sup>

In signing the Deed of Commitment, signatory organizations declare that they will not only refrain from any further deployment of antipersonnel landmines, but also agree to destroy their stockpile of mines as well as to “cooperate in the clearance of mines which they or others may have laid previously in their areas of operation”. The commitment of these latest three groups brings the total number of signatory organizations from Burma to six, along with the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO), the Chin National Front (CNF), and the National United Party of Arakan (NUPA), all of whom signed the Deed in 2006.<sup>7</sup> Shortly after his organization signed the document, Mai Aik Phone, the General Secretary of the PSLF, stated the following:

*“I know all too well the effect of landmines on the civilian population. My own grandmother lost her life after stepping on a mine laid in a tea plantation. Although opposition groups are using mines to target the military and for defence, all too often the victims are civilians and animals”.*<sup>8</sup>

In a country so plagued by landmine contamination, precious little is done towards reducing the casualty rate by way of demining programs or through educating the public on the risks associated with landmines. The SPDC has no humanitarian mine clearance programs in Burma whatsoever. Various NSAs are reported to occasionally clear areas of mines when they pose too great a risk to civilian populations or when those mines that they have deployed in ambushes are deemed no longer necessary. In either case, all mine clearing activities are conducted on a sporadic or ad hoc basis, and, given the substantial continuing levels of deployment, ultimately make little impact on the net annual increase of landmine contamination. (For more information, see Section 4.3: De-mining Activities below).

Similarly, the SPDC offers no provision for Mine Risk Education (MRE), which has proven to be an invaluable tool in reducing the risk that landmine contamination poses to civilian populations. Various Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have made some efforts to implement MRE programs, but these have inevitably been hampered by a lack of available resources, lack of access to the most prone areas, and for those organizations attempting to work through official channels, a complete lack of political will on the part of the SPDC to combat what represents one of the county’s greatest scourges. (For more information, see Section 4.5: Mine Risk Education below).

## 4.2 Landmine Devices

According to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), Burma is one of only 13 countries known to still produce antipersonnel landmines. The mines are manufactured in purpose-built factories which are overseen by the state-run enterprise, Myanmar Defence Products Industries. These factories are known to produce the MM-1 Stake Fragmentation Mine (SFM) and the MM-2 Blast Mine (BM). These mines are copies of the Chinese Type 58 SFM and the Chinese Type 58 BM, respectively. It is also widely believed that these factories are capable of producing a Directional Fragmentation Mine (DFM) similar to the U.S.-manufactured M-18 'Claymore' DFM.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to those mines that they are capable of producing domestically, the SPDC also deploys antipersonnel landmines of foreign manufacture. Such mines have, in the past, been shown to have been of Chinese, Soviet, Indian, Italian, and U.S.-manufacture. Reports emerged during 2007 that the SPDC has also been deploying a Type 69 Bounding Fragmentation Mine (BFM), believed to be of Chinese origin.<sup>10</sup>

A number of other mines of unknown origin have also been extensively deployed in Burma. For instance, over the past few years, SPDC army units have been deploying a copy of the diminutive U.S.-made M-14 blast mine in northern Karen State under its continuing military offensive being waged against the civilian villagers in the region. Thousands of these mines have reportedly been laid in Karen State alone since 2005. Though this mine resembles the M-14 mine, its origin of manufacture is unknown. HRDU has been unable to ascertain whether the SPDC has begun to produce these mines or if they have been acquiring them on the international arms market.<sup>11</sup>

In August 2007, the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) reported that they had identified at least three different victim-activated antipersonnel landmines and a further three command-activated landmines being deployed in Karen State.<sup>12</sup> The report, however, failed to mention the names and models of these mines and it is quite likely that a number of other mines are also being deployed in addition to the six that they have identified.

Landmines, once deployed, can remain an indiscriminate threat to combatants and civilians alike for many years. Commercially-manufactured mines such as those being deployed by SPDC army forces can carry a lifespan of several years, or in some cases even decades, after they are laid. The danger is exacerbated by the general refusal of SPDC army soldiers to inform the local civilian population or even other SPDC army units about the locations of landmines that they have deployed. Moreover, landmines are commonly deployed by SPDC army units in areas frequented by civilians in a manner which strongly suggests that the civilians are the intended targets.<sup>13</sup>

Numerous Non-State Actors (NSAs) in Burma also continued to deploy antipersonnel landmines during 2007, with a number of these groups being capable of producing their own landmines. In contrast to the domestically-produced or imported factory-manufactured models employed by the SPDC, those used by NSAs are usually homemade Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). These are typically constructed from readily-available local materials such as bamboo tubes, PVC plastic piping, or glass bottles and packed with gunpowder, a small amount of explosive (which may include TNT, ANFO or urea nitrate), and ball bearings or other similar fragmentation.<sup>14</sup> Such mines typically utilize cheap commercially-available alkaline batteries to charge the fusing mechanism and detonate the mine once an electrical current is established. These makeshift devices possess a much shorter lifespan than commercially-manufactured models and tend to fail within six months of deployment as the battery expires or the natural materials used in their construction degrade.<sup>15</sup>

According to the *Landmine Monitor*, published annually by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, those armed NSAs identified as being able to manufacture their own landmines, and who continued to do so during 2007, include the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), and the Karenni Army (KA). Some of these groups are also capable of producing more sophisticated mines. For instance, the UWSA produces their own MM-2 type blast mines in a munitions factory formerly operated by the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) near their capital at Pahsang in eastern Shan State. Meanwhile, groups such as the KNLA and the DKBA are known to produce Claymore-type directional fragmentation mines and mines incorporating anti-handling devices.<sup>16</sup> It is also quite likely that the newly formed KNU/KNLA Peace Council (KNU/KNLAPC), which broke away from the Karen National Union (KNU; of which the KNLA is the armed wing) in January 2007 are also capable of producing such mines as many of the soldiers who defected would certainly possess the skills to do so having long employed them for the KNLA.

In addition to laying landmines of their own manufacture, many non-state groups on occasion also use factory-produced mines by redeploing SPDC-laid mines lifted from the ground, capturing mines in raids on SPDC arsenals, or acquiring them on the black market.<sup>17</sup>



A Type 69 Bounding Fragmentation Mine believed to be of Chinese origin. This mine was originally deployed by SPDC army soldiers in Toungoo District, Karen State, but had been lifted from the ground by KNLA soldiers prior to this photo being taken. [Photo: KHRG]

### 4.3 De-mining Activities

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) has reported that no official or systematic humanitarian de-mining programs were conducted in Burma during 2007, in spite of some sporadic mine clearances that were reported to have taken place in previous years. Independent reports have suggested that some non-state actors (NSAs) will occasionally remove landmines they have deployed if they were not detonated during the ambush that they were planted for, or if it appears that SPDC army troops are leaving the area.<sup>18</sup> Although, none of the NSAs operating in Burma have been reported to conduct any systematic or rigorous mine clearance programs. Whatever de-mining that has been carried out could perhaps more accurately be described as military “minefield breaching” in which mines are lifted to allow a military unit to pass, as opposed to humanitarian “minefield clearing” where landmines are permanently removed for the safety of the civilian population. Ultimately, the extensive deployment of further mines compared to the ad hoc nature of de-mining activities in Burma strongly suggests that there is a significant year-on-year net increase in the number of landmines deployed in Burma.

There is little evidence available to suggest that any of the armed groups responsible for deploying landmines in Burma have devised an effective strategy to systematically map the placement of their mines, or to mark the presence of live minefields. Several armed resistance groups have claimed to make efforts to inform local villagers of any landmines that they may deploy in their area. However, in most cases, the villagers may only be told which paths or areas have been mined, but more specific information on the actual locations of the mines are typically withheld.

Such widespread and haphazard deployment of landmines, coupled with the near total failure of armed actors to mark minefields, mean that landmines, once placed, are largely lost or forgotten until such time that they are trodden on, or unearthed by chance, typically resulting in severe injury, permanent disfigurement, or death.



SPDC army soldiers photographed planting an antipersonnel landmine on a road in Mone Township of Nyaunglebin District, Karen State in March 2007. Despite such overwhelming evidence, SPDC army units typically deny deploying landmines in areas frequented by civilians, stating that resistance groups are responsible for deploying mines in these areas and are thus responsible for any injuries or deaths sustained. *[Photo: FBR]*



## 4.4 Human Minesweeping

Much as in previous years, 2007 saw the continued use of human minesweepers by SPDC army units. This serious contravention of international human rights standards, also referred to as "atrocious de-mining", entails forcing civilians to walk in front of army patrols in areas suspected of landmine contamination, placing the civilians at considerable risk of being wounded, maimed, or killed, while the soldiers follow at a safe distance beyond the blast radius. The SPDC typically refuses to provide medical attention or compensation to civilians injured in this manner. They instead are instructed to seek compensation or assistance from resistance forces, blaming them for setting the mines.

There have also been consistent reliable reports stating that SPDC army soldiers also continued to force civilian villagers to act as human shields in areas of armed conflict during 2007. Such reports speak of forcing villagers to stand beside or sit on SPDC army machinery or infrastructure to deter armed opposition groups from attacking or deploying landmines for fear of wounding the civilians. However, this strategy does not always work and many civilians are injured in this manner.

On 1 January 2007, Light Infantry Division (LID) #66 commander Maung Maung Aye forced ten Karen villagers from the Kler Lah relocation site in Toungoo District, Karen State to serve as human shields for the SPDC army bulldozer repairing the road between Maw Pah Der and Kaw Soe Koh villages. The following day, on 2 January 2007, an unnamed officer with Military Operations Command (MOC) #16, based in nearby Play Hsa Loh village ordered seven villagers from Ye Loh, and five from Plaw Baw Der to report to Bon Ma Tee village also to act as human shields for a bulldozer operating on the Kler Lah – Bu Hsa Kee motor road.<sup>19</sup>

On 5 January 2007, two villagers were killed and a bullock cart destroyed after SPDC army soldiers forced villagers from Tha Pan Chaung and Htee Loh villages in Toungoo District of Karen State to clear landmines from the area. In such instances, villagers are not provided with the correct tools, safety equipment, proper training or any form of compensation for this dangerous work. Similarly, families are rarely compensated for the deaths of their loved ones while performing this work.<sup>20</sup>

On 16 January 2007, SPDC army soldiers from Infantry Battalions (IB) #68 and #69 forced villagers from Play Hsa Loh, Yeh Loh and Plaw Baw Der in Toungoo District, Karen State to walk in front of their bulldozers as human minesweepers.<sup>21</sup>

On 15 February 2007, SPDC army soldiers forced an unspecified number of villagers from Kler Lah village in Toungoo District, Karen State to "*take security*" for four bulldozers being used to construct a new road in the area. To "*take security*" in this instance means that these villagers were forced to walk along the road in front of the bulldozer as human minesweepers so that any mines deployed in their path would be detonated by the villagers and not the bulldozer.<sup>22</sup>

On 17 February 2007, SPDC army soldiers under MOC #5 forced 300 villagers from Kler Lah to walk in front of SPDC army soldiers as human minesweepers as they portered military rations to the Tha Aye Hta SPDC army camp clear the area of landmines.<sup>23</sup>

On 18 February 2007, an unspecified number of civilian villagers from Kler Lah village in Toungoo District of Karen State were ordered by SPDC army soldiers under MOC #5 to porter supplies to the SPDC army camp in nearby Tha Aye while walking in front of the SPDC army soldiers who accompanied them.<sup>24</sup>



On 20 February 2007, the Camp Commander of Bawgali Gyi SPDC army camp adjacent to the Kler Lah relocation site in Toungoo District, Karen State forced an unspecified number of villagers from Kler Lah, Kaw Thay Der, Klay Soe Kee, Ler Ko, and Kaw Soe Koh villages to ride motorcycles ahead of SPDC army soldiers along the Kler Lah – Bu Hsa Kee road. The road is believed to be mined so the villagers are forced to do this so that they would detonate the mines rather than the soldiers.<sup>25</sup>

On 3 March 2007, a number of villages in the vicinity of the SPDC army camp at Play Hsa Loh in Toungoo District, Karen State were each ordered to provide one person to perform forced labour for the construction of a new road in the area. At all times, at least two of these villagers were forced to sit on the bulldozer being used to build the road as human shields to dissuade resistance forces operating in the area from planting landmines on the road or from attacking the machinery.<sup>26</sup>

On 17 March, SPDC army soldiers forced 300 people from Kler Lah village in Toungoo District, Karen State to porter supplies while walking in front of the soldiers as human minesweepers.<sup>27</sup>

Five villagers were wounded near Kwee De Kaw in Nyaunglebin District, Karen State on 9 April 2007 when being forced to act as human minesweepers for the SPDC. The villagers were ordered to load their bullock cart with supplies and push it along the road by SPDC army soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #590 when it ran over a landmine. None of the wounded villagers were compensated for the injuries that they sustained.<sup>28</sup>

On 20 June 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #566 ordered 46 villagers to carry rations to their camp at Paw Bpaw Soe. The villagers were ordered to walk ahead of the soldiers as human minesweepers, and as a result, Saw Bo Mya, 36, and Saw Oh Htoo, 35, both of Kaw Day Ther village in Toungoo District, Karen State, were severely injured after one of them stepped on a landmine.<sup>29</sup>



A landmine victim receiving a below-the-knee amputation from Karen medics in February 2007. Such procedures are often conducted in the absence of anaesthetic owing to a lack of available resources. [Photo: FBR]

## 4.5 Mine Risk Education

There remains no systematic State-run provision of education on the risks associated with landmines in Burma. Though the ICBL describes Mine Risk Education (MRE) as playing a crucial role in reducing casualty rates by “seek[ing] to reduce the risk of injury from mines by raising awareness and promoting behavioural change”,<sup>30</sup> no such trainings were implemented by the SPDC during 2007.

The few MRE programs that are conducted in Burma are run by NGOs and local CBOs, and exist on an ad hoc basis. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), had previously conducted MRE in Burma, but suspended their programs in 2005. During 2007 these programs were reported to remain “on hold”.<sup>31</sup> The Committee for Internally Displaced Karen Persons (CIDKP) along with the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW) conducted a “Dangerous Areas Survey” in 2006 in contested regions of Karen State in which they mapped out 81 dangerous areas, the majority of which were labelled as such due to mine contamination, collected data on 464 mine casualties and provided MRE to a reported 8,200 people living within the survey area.<sup>32</sup> The local NGO, Shanti Sena, also continued to provide MRE in 2007. Similarly, the KDHW ran an MRE program in areas of Karen State nominally controlled by the KNU, and erected warning signs identifying a number of known mined areas.

As in previous years, MRE programs continued to be conducted in the numerous refugee camps located along the Thai-Burma border. These programs were implemented by various NGOs such as Handicap International (HI) and the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS). However, a survey conducted in these camps has strongly suggested that further work is required in this field with only 40 percent of those surveyed stating prior knowledge of landmines in Burma.<sup>33</sup> However, as some of these camps have been in existence for over 20 years, it is possible that many of those interviewed were either born in the camps or had arrived many years ago and thus possessed limited direct knowledge of the situation inside Burma.



This Burmese-language sign, photographed posted on a tree on the boundary of the LID #66 SPDC army camp at Htee Hta Bu in Toungoo District, Karen State in February 2007, reads “Beware mines”. The soldiers based in this camp were also reported to have been responsible for deploying landmines in a number of nearby civilian villages. Signs such as this are rare in Burma, where most mined areas are unmarked. [Photo: KHRG]

## 4.6 Situation in the Ethnic Minority Territories

According to the *Landmine Monitor*, nine of Burma's 14 states and divisions suffer from landmine contamination. Of these, the worst affected are those states situated in the east of the country adjacent to Thailand. It is within these states, particularly in Karen, Karenni and Shan States that the regime continues to wage its war against the ethnic minorities living in those areas. (For more information, see Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights).

Sustained armed conflict in these areas during 2007 only served to exacerbate the problem. The SPDC and their allied ceasefire groups continued to use landmines as a leading means to target the armed resistance forces, to divide civilian populations from those groups, and to directly target the civilian population themselves. Meanwhile, resistance forces continued to deploy landmines in ambushes against SPDC army units and their allies and to protect villagers and internally displaced communities. In some areas, armed resistance forces have even distributed mines among IDP communities so that they could defend themselves from advancing SPDC army columns and to secure the path of their retreat.<sup>34</sup>

Regrettably, civilians tend to bear the brunt of the damage caused by landmine deployment in Burma. Not only do civilians frequently step on landmines, but so do their livestock. Moreover, civilians often lose access to their fields and their livelihoods along with it for fear of unearthing or stepping on a mine that may have been laid there. (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood). A statement by Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar, criticized the SPDC regime for its ongoing military campaigns in ethnic minority territories, describing the damage inflicted on civilians as going beyond that associated with the heightened risk of living in a conflict zone, but that it was a deliberate strategy on the part of the SPDC to intimidate the people of the region, and to disrupt their lives and any relationship they may share with armed opposition groups. SPDC army soldiers have frequently deployed landmines in civilian villages and fields in an apparent attempt to dissuade displaced communities from ever returning to their homes for fear they may tread on a concealed mine. This, according to Pinheiro, is "*a concerted policy aimed at denying people their livelihoods and food or forcing them to risk their lives when they attempt to return to their villages after having been forcibly evicted*".<sup>35</sup>

The ethnic minority territories are also particularly heavily mined along the frontiers in the regions adjacent to the national borders with Bangladesh, India and Thailand. The SPDC, like the regimes before them, have extensively deployed landmines along the nation's borders as part of a strategy to prevent the outflow of refugees into neighbouring countries, as well as to prevent those who have already fled from returning safely to their homes. (For more information, see the following sections on the border regions). Burma also shares a border with China, however, this region is not covered in this report as limited information is available on this region.

On 3 January 2007, SPDC army soldiers planted 15 landmines on the Toungoo-Mawchi road in Southern Karenni State.<sup>36</sup>

On 9 January 2007, Saw Cho Cho, of Zee Pyu Gone village, was wounded after stepping on a landmine in the vicinity of Ler Kla Der village in Toungoo District of Karen State, in which he lost one of his legs.<sup>37</sup>

On 11 January 2007, Saw Htay Ler Win was killed when he stepped on an SPDC landmine in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District of Northern Karen State.<sup>38</sup>

On 12 January 2008, an unidentified man was reported killed after stepping on an “*insurgent-planted*” landmine in Kyauk Kyi Township of Pegu (Bago) Division. Official reports, upon which the Xinhua News Agency bases their reports, typically lay the blame on resistance groups even though the SPDC’s mine laying program is by far the most extensive, is carried out in the absence of any form of mapping system, and is often conducted in areas frequented by civilians. Realistically, it is far more likely that the mine had been laid by SPDC army soldiers.<sup>39</sup>

On 24 January 2007, official reports maintained that four people were injured in four separate landmine explosions on consecutive days in Pegu (Bago) Division. The state-run English-language newspaper, the *New Light of Myanmar*, blamed the “*destructive acts of terrorists*”, but refused to name who they believed to be responsible. Given the location of these mines, this was probably an allusion to the KNU whose soldiers maintain a presence in the area.<sup>40</sup>

On 25 January 2007, 35-year-old U Kyaw Lwin, of Myaung U village in Kyauk Kyi Township, Karen State, lost his leg to a landmine placed near his village as he was returning home from working in his fields. Without his leg, he will find it extremely difficult to continue to provide for his family.<sup>41</sup>

On 30 January 2007, SPDC forces planted landmines around Htee Hsaw Meh village of Papun District, Karen State, preventing villagers from being able to go to their fields.<sup>42</sup>

Just before 10:00 am on 2 February 2007, 20-year-old Saw Say Plo Wah from Ter Mu Kee village in Nyaunglebin District, Karen State lost his right foot when he stepped on an SPDC army landmine. The landmine had reportedly been planted near his village by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #567 in October 2006 as part of the ongoing offensive in the region.<sup>43</sup>

On 13 February 2007, Saw Htay Ler, a villager from Kaw Pope village in Nyaunglebin District, Karen State, was killed by a landmine planted by SPDC army forces in the vicinity of Mu Ka Day village.<sup>44</sup>

On 15 February 2007, Naw Tin Lay and Saw Maung Pwe, both from Kaw Thay Der village in Toungoo District, Karen State were wounded after detonating a landmine while performing forced labour for the SPDC.<sup>45</sup>

On 15 February 2007, SPDC army soldiers forced the owners of nine trucks to transport their rations and supplies from Mawchi in Karenni State to the SPDC army camp at Bu Hsa Kee in northern Karen State. Two of these trucks, owned by Naw Day L’Yar and Saw Sa Baw were badly damaged when they drove over landmines near Tha Aye Hta. Kaw Thay Der villagers Naw Tay Lay and Saw Maw Pweh were reportedly wounded in one of the blasts. Two days later, on 17 February, over 200 villagers from 12 separate villages in the vicinity of Kler Lah in Toungoo District, Karen State were ordered to porter the supplies by foot as these two trucks were no longer fit to use. Neither of the truck owners were compensated for the damage done to their vehicles.<sup>46</sup>

On 25 February 2007, the Military Operations Command (MOC) #9 Commander based in the Tha Pyay Nyunt SPDC army camp in Toungoo District, Karen State issued a warning to the village heads of all ten villages of Play Hsa Loh village tract that they would be forcibly relocated and used as forced labour should any of his soldiers step on any KNLA-deployed landmines. The villagers, however, have very little, if any, control over the activities of the KNLA and are in no position to instruct them not to ambush the SPDC.<sup>47</sup>

On 16 March 2007, 44-year-old U Than Sein, of Kaung Mon village in Mergui-Tavoy District of southern Karen State lost his left foot after stepping on a landmine while portering supplies for the SPDC. Though not stated in the report, it is unlikely that he would have received any form of compensation for his loss. It is quite rare for the SPDC to provide compensation to landmine victims, even when it is clear that the mine had been laid by SPDC army soldiers.<sup>48</sup>

On 14 March 2007, the Karenni Development Research Group (KDRG) released a statement which maintained that 12 civilian villagers had been killed by landmines during 2006 and 2007 near the site of the proposed Wei Gyi dam on the Salween River.<sup>49</sup>

On 30 March 2007, troops of the SPDC-aligned DKBA attacked villagers in northern Dooplaya District, Karen State. During the attacks one unnamed man died after stepping on a DKBA-laid landmine.<sup>50</sup>

On 8 April 2007, eight DKBA soldiers were killed in an ambush by a KNLA-deployed landmine in Pa'an District of Karen State.<sup>51</sup>

On 11 April, 2007, five Karen villagers were wounded when one of their group stepped on an SPDC army landmine near Kwee De Kaw in Nyaunglebin District, Karen State while portering supplies for LIB #375.<sup>52</sup>

On 16 April 2007, Saw Mu Kyaw Wa, Saw Dadoh Wa and Saw Kyaw Ri were injured while portering for the SPDC after one of the other porters in their group stepped on a landmine near the LIB #599 army camp at Kwee Dee Koh in Nyaunglebin District, Karen State.<sup>53</sup>

On 18 April 2007, a villager from Ler Kla Der in Toungoo District of Karen State stepped on a landmine reportedly planted by SPDC army soldiers.<sup>54</sup>

On 29 April 2007, two villagers from Keh Law Mah Kee village were wounded after one of them stepped on a DKBA-laid landmine in Dooplaya District of Karen State. Saw Hai Bluh, 30, was killed in the blast, while his unnamed companion survived, albeit with severe injuries.<sup>55</sup>

In April 2007, it was reported that an unnamed hospital in Mae Sot of Tak Province in Thailand were at that time treating ten landmine victims from Burma. According to the report, the victims were:

1. Four DKBA soldiers from #999 Special Battalion based in Shwe Ko Ko near Myawaddy in Karen State;
2. Three KNLA 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade soldiers from Dooplaya District of Karen State;
3. Two villagers, presumably Karen; and
4. One porter (possibly a convict porter).<sup>56</sup>

On 4 May 2007, Ko Tin Myint from Ywathaya village in eastern Pegu (Bago) Division reportedly lost his left foot in a landmine explosion. According to the report, originally made in the state-run media, the victim received treatment in Toungoo hospital. The report accused an unnamed insurgent group for laying the mine, which, given the location of the mine, was most likely an allusion to the KNLA.<sup>57</sup>

On 5 May 2007, Maung Lin Htaik, stepped on a landmine while collecting vegetables in the forest near his home in Kawpyin village of Pegu (Bago) Division. The state-run report maintained that his left foot was blown off in the blast and that he later received treatment in Mone hospital. As with the case listed above, blame for deployment of the mine was levelled at an unnamed insurgent group, which again, was most likely a reference to the KNLA.<sup>58</sup>



On 16 May 2007, 28-year-old Saw Beh Ka Hlay from Klaw Mee Der village in Toungoo District of Karen State was killed after stepping on a landmine planted by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #539.<sup>59</sup>

On 4 June 2007, IB #60 battalion commander, Zaw Lin, ordered the villagers from Shwe Chan, Th' Beh Gone, Aung Soe Moe, and Thay Boh villages in Nyaunglebin District of Karen State to confine themselves to their villages. In issuing this order, he had also warned them that his soldiers had recently laid 250 landmines around the villages.<sup>60</sup>

On June 11 2007, 27-year-old Saw Wah Hsay Hler was wounded after stepping on a landmine deployed by SPDC army soldiers operating in Toungoo District, Karen State. Although he survived the blast, his left leg had to be amputated below the knee. The photograph shown below was taken as Karen medics were performing the amputation on what remained of his mangled left leg.<sup>61</sup>



Karen medics perform a below-the-knee amputation on 27-year-old Karen villager Saw Wah Hsay Hler from Ha Htoh Per village in Toungoo District, Karen State. Saw Wah Hsay Hler's left foot was blown off after he stepped on an SPDC-deployed landmine on 11 June 2007. [Photo: KHRG]

According to a document released by the KNU on 30 June 2007, during the 12 months spanning 1 June 2006 and 31 May 2007, KNLA soldiers had "captured" a total of 61 landmines from the SPDC and the DKBA. Of this number, 51 mines were reported as being captured from the SPDC, while 10 were captured from the DKBA. The vast majority of these mines, regardless of who they were captured from, were seized in Dooplaya District of Karen State. The report failed to state if these mines had been lifted from the ground, seized during raids on SPDC and DKBA armouries, or taken from the bodies of the dead and wounded.<sup>62</sup>

On 4 July 2007, a married couple, U Pho Htin and Daw La Pyait, of Maw Htoo Tha Lae village near Myawaddy in Karen State, were seriously injured after stepping on a landmine. Saw Eh Thamwe, coordinator of the Mine Victim Department of the Mae Tao Clinic (MTC) just across the border in Mae Sot, Thailand reported that "[t]he wife lost both of her legs and her husband has gone blind. Because their wounds were quite serious we have sent them to the Mae Sot [H]ospital with the assistance of the International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC]."<sup>63</sup>

On 12 July, a SPDC army soldier moving in an offensive column composed of soldiers from LIB #378 and LIB #388 stepped on a landmine in Nyaunglebin District of Karen State. Five days earlier, the soldiers had captured four villagers from Blut Doh village and forced them to walk in front and guide them to Wah Do Ko village. Three of these villagers were shot and killed when they refused, while the fourth only managed to escape in the confusion following the landmine explosion.<sup>64</sup>

On 27 July 2007, it was reported that SPDC army soldiers from LIB #530 had been deploying a large number of landmines throughout Loikemlay village tract in Loikaw Township, Karenni State. According to the report, the mines had *“seriously obstructed the farmers with their hill farming”* and that at least 15 cattle had been killed after they had stepped on the mines.<sup>65</sup>

On 30 July 2007, two villagers, Ma Soe, 30 and Maung Soe Win, 12, from Kyauk Kyi Township in Karen State were wounded while collecting bamboo shoots from the forest when one of them stepped on a landmine planted by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #351 close to the village of Sa Le. Both of the villagers were then fined 10,000 kyat each for destruction of state property.<sup>66</sup>

It was reported on 5 July 2007 that mine casualties in Karen State had *“increased dramatically”* during 2007 due to *“increased tensions between the Karen National Union and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army”*. The report, citing Saw Eh Thamwe, coordinator of the Mine Victim Department of the Mae Tao Clinic (MTC), stated that as many as 30 persons had been treated for mine-related injuries in the first half of 2007 with 16 persons being treated in June 2007 alone.<sup>67</sup>

According to a report released on 7 August 2007, farmers in Loikaw Township, Karenni State are facing many difficulties maintaining their livelihoods due to landmine contamination. It was reported that SPDC army soldiers from LIB #530 had been deploying numerous types of landmines along the banks of rivers and streams near Nam Mahuu village since 27 July 2007. Local villagers reportedly pleaded with the battalion commander to remove the mines, but their calls were said to have been ignored. Meanwhile, the farmers are afraid to travel to their fields for fear of stepping on one of the mines or losing any more of their livestock to them: *“Villagers are afraid of going to [their] farms because they have planted [landmines] around [the] farms. After arriving in the farms we have to release the buffaloes and cows. Buffalo[es] and cows are known to step on [landmines] and have been killed. About 15 buffaloes and cows were killed”*.<sup>68</sup>

It was also reported on 7 August 2007 that four unnamed men from Shadaw Township, Karenni State, and one unnamed woman from Dimawhso Township, also in Karenni State, had been killed by landmines between March and May 2007.<sup>69</sup>

On 17 August 2007, 23-year-old Saw Maw Htoo Say, from Blah Kee village in Toungoo District, Karen State was killed after stepping on a landmine placed by SPDC army troops operating under MOC #5 near Koh Haw Der village.<sup>70</sup>

On 11 August 2007, a Karen villager from Mone Township in Nyaunglebin District, Karen State, whose name was withheld to protect his identity, had one of his feet blown off by a landmine as he was returning home from his rice storage barn. The mine was believed to have been laid by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #379 who had been operating in the area.<sup>71</sup>

On 21 August 2007, an unnamed 25-year-old man in western Karenni State was maimed after stepping on a landmine that had been laid several weeks earlier by an SPDC army patrol. According to the report, local Karenni resistance soldiers (presumably the KNPP) were aware that the SPDC had planted two mines in the area, one of which had already



been detonated by one of the SPDC army soldiers during their patrol. The exact location of the second device was unknown until stepped on by this villager.<sup>72</sup>

On 10 September 2007, 18-year-old Saw Po Dee from Klay Soe Kee village in northern Karen State hung himself as a result of having lost his leg to a landmine. Earlier in the year, Saw Po Dee was forced to serve as a porter and human minesweeper for Military Operations Command (MOC) #5 of the SPDC army when he stepped on the mine. Saw Po Dee then committed suicide after returning home from hospital to find that his wife had no more rice left to cook and that he would not be able to adequately provide for his family.<sup>73</sup>

On 27 September 2007, several villagers from the Myekanbaw village tract in Mergui-Tavoy District, Karen State suffered landmine injuries as they were travelling between their villages and their plantations. With the exception of Naw Paw, who was killed on the spot, all of the victims required below the knee amputations. The victims were:

1. Saw Maung Htet, 40, from Nyaungdon village;
2. Saw Ti Thiek, 55, from Kyay Than village;
3. Saw Yin Ba, 38, from Thapya Chaung village;
4. Saw Hae Hi, 59, from Nin Ga Yok village;
5. Saw Kawla, 35, from Kami village;
6. Naw Ly Dia, 45, from Pyin Tha Taw village, and
7. Naw Pay, 45, from Pyin Tha Taw village.<sup>74</sup>

On 10 October, the Monland Restoration Army (MRA) denied accusations made by the SPDC that they had placed landmines that killed two villagers and injured two more on a hillside in near Bayoun Ngae village in Ye Township, Mon State. The MRA admitted they were using landmines in their campaign against the SPDC army, but claimed they did not know who had laid these particular mines.<sup>75</sup>

On 13 October 2007, SPDC army troops attacked Yaw Kee village in Mon Township of western Karen State, burning down 10 houses and the church. When villagers fled into the surrounding jungle, the SPDC army entered the village, looting homes and laying several landmines. The villagers were unable to re-enter the village for fear of treading on landmines.<sup>76</sup>

On 27 October 2007, 21-year-old Ko Tit Phyto stepped on a landmine in the town of Three Pagodas Pass, Karen State, which had been placed near to the house of DKBA officer, Lieutenant Tan Win. Ko Tit Phyto's right leg was badly injured, and he was subsequently taken to a hospital in Thailand for treatment.<sup>77</sup>

On 14 November 2007, Saw P--- stepped on an SPDC-deployed landmine near the site of a new SPDC army camp in Mone Township, Karen State. Saw P--- survived the mine blast but sustained severe injuries. The following day, local SPDC army officers ordered five nearby villages engaged in the construction of the new camp to each pay 50,000 kyat in compensation to Saw P---, despite the fact that the mine had been laid by SPDC army soldiers.<sup>78</sup>

On 19 November 2007, 13-year-old Saw K'Tray Soe, accidentally detonated a landmine near Lay Kee village in Toungoo District of northern Karen State while gathering bamboo leaves to repair the roof for his family's home. Shrapnel from the blast struck him in the face, leaving him blinded and severely wounding his face, throat and chest. His 8-year-old sister also received shrapnel wounds to her face. The mine was believed to have been laid on 16 August 2007 by SPDC army soldiers operating under LID #88 who attacked Lay Kee village on that day and burned down one of the homes. The photographs shown on the following page show the wounds that he had sustained from the blast.<sup>79</sup>



These photos show 13-year-old Saw K'Tray Soe, after an SPDC army landmine blew up in his face on 19 November 2007, sending shrapnel into his face, throat and chest and leaving him blinded. [Photos: FBR]

On 19 November 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #218 and LIB #219 operating under Tactical Operation Command (TOC) #1 of LID #11 were reported to have deployed a number of landmines in and around the fields of Ler Wah village in Nyaunglebin District of Karen State.<sup>80</sup>

On 30 November 2007, 55-year-old Saw Maw Gkya from Ha Htoh Per village in Toungoo District of northern Karen State was killed after stepping on a landmine deployed by SPDC army soldiers operating under MOC #4.<sup>81</sup>

On 18 December 2007, the junta-controlled *New Light of Myanmar* reported that members of the KNLA ambushed a passenger bus as it travelled between Kawkareik and Myawaddy in Karen State by detonating a landmine under it before opening fire on those aboard. Eight passengers were reportedly killed with a further six injured. The state-run media criticized the KNU for "*constantly committing all destructive acts such as undermining [the] stability of the State, community peace and tranquility [sic.] and prevalence of law and order, killing and bullying innocent people, detonating bombs, armed robberies, collecting extortion money, and burning public property*". Though the KNLA claimed responsibility for the attack, stating that it was conducted in retaliation to an earlier DKBA attack on Tah Oh Kee village, they denied targeting civilians, but rather DKBA members who were on board.<sup>82</sup>

## 4.7 Burma-Thailand Border

The Kingdom of Thailand became a State Party to the Mine Ban Treaty in 1999, but is still yet to enact comprehensive domestic legislation to fully implement the terms of the treaty. According to the ICBL, the consultative process intended to incorporate the treaty's requirements into Thai policy remains ongoing. In April 2003, however, Thailand did complete its requirements to destroy its stockpile of mines under Article 4 of the treaty, and according to the ICBL, retains only 4,713 mines for training purposes.<sup>83</sup>

As noted above, landmine contamination on the Burmese side of the Burma-Thailand border is extensive, although, many communities on the Thai side of the border are also affected. A 2001 Landmine Impact Survey, which remains the foundation for all mine action in Thailand, found that 139 communities located on the Thai side of the Burma-Thailand border were adversely affected by their proximity to landmines. According to the 2007 edition of the *Landmine Monitor*, 500 km<sup>2</sup> of Thai soil remains contaminated by landmines, and though not explicitly stated in the report, it is highly likely that much of this area is situated along the 2,500 km long border that Thailand shares with Burma. Under the terms elucidated in Article 5 of the Mine Ban Treaty, Thailand is obliged to complete the clearance of all mined areas within its territories by 1 May 2009; however, the ICBL stated in 2007 that the prospect of this deadline being met was "low".<sup>84</sup>

Over the past few decades, hundreds of thousands of refugees, displaced by the junta's continual military campaigns in the ethnic minority territories in eastern Burma, have fled to Thailand seeking refuge. This has prompted successive Burmese military regimes to heavily mine the border, both to prevent the exodus of refugees, and also to discourage those who have successfully fled from attempting to return home. Attempts at mine clearance in this area are not only hampered by the ongoing conflict in the region, but also by the lack of political will on the part of the SPDC.

Landmine contamination has also impeded a number of bilateral economic and development projects in the region. On 3 March 2007, Pradit Hongto, 50, a Thai businessman, was killed in Karenni State when the vehicle he was travelling in drove over a landmine near the border with Thailand. According to reports, the victim was visiting his brother, Sanoh Hongto, who is the co-owner of an antimony mine located in territory controlled by the SPDC-allied Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF). His colleague, Somboon Hongnimit, was also injured and taken to a hospital in Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand, before being transferred to Chiang Mai. Various armed groups had been operating in the area, and it is not known who was responsible for placing the landmine.<sup>85</sup>

Moreover, three employees of the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) were also killed by landmines in Burma during 2007 in separate incidents. The first of these, an unnamed geologist, was killed in January 2007, while another died in May 2007. Then, on 2 September 2007, Saman Kantameun, a 53-year-old engineer, was killed on 2 September 2007, after accidentally detonating a landmine while surveying the proposed site of the Hat Gyi hydroelectric dam to be built jointly by the SPDC and the Thai engineering firm MDX. Soon after the incident, Kraisi Karnasuta, the director of EGAT, said that he was withdrawing his workers until their safety could be guaranteed, stating that they would only "return to the site when the Burmese junta reinforced security". SPDC mouthpiece, the *New Light of Myanmar*, predictably laid blame for the attack on the KNU, although KNU General Secretary P'Doh Mahn Sha was quick to deny this claim, countering that both DKBA and SPDC army troops were active in the area.<sup>86</sup>

## 4.8 Burma-Bangladesh Border

Bangladesh became a State Party to the Mine Ban Treaty in 2001, and on 28 February 2005 completed the destruction of its landmine stockpile. However, since that time, Bangladesh's progress to fulfil its obligations under the treaty has slowed to the point of inactivity. Amendments to domestic policy, as in previous years, remain "in progress"; progress which has been described by the ICBL as being "inadequate".<sup>87</sup>

Similar to the Burma-Thailand border, the Burma-Bangladesh border is heavily contaminated by landmines. SPDC army units have extensively mined the region in order to prevent the exodus of refugees, particularly the egress of the ethnic Rohingya who inhabit the area, as well as to discourage those who do manage to cross the border into Bangladesh from attempting to risk the hazardous journey back to their homes.

Bangladesh has, in previous years, claimed that their border with Burma has been mined by the NaSaKa (Burmese border security force), and that survivors of mine incidents can be found in villages located along the border. However, according to the *Landmine Monitor*, interviews conducted with persons in areas earlier thought to be contaminated, have suggested that contamination is less prevalent in the region than was previously imagined.<sup>88</sup>

In previous years, Bangladeshi authorities have announced the capture of landmines from armed opposition groups on the Bangladesh side of the border, and this trend continued in 2007. On 20 March, military officers with the Bangladeshi Rifles (BDR) announced that they had recovered 26 live antipersonnel landmines following a raid on the headquarters of an unnamed insurgent group in Nakhongsari Township, opposite Burma's Maungdaw Township in Arakan State.<sup>89</sup> Other reports maintained that Bangladeshi Border Security Forces (BSF) had recovered an undeclared number of mines from an undisclosed location along the Burma-Bangladesh border in March 2007. Two different armed opposition groups active in the area later stated that the mines may have been theirs; however, in the absence of proper mapping procedures, they could not be certain.<sup>90</sup>



A Karen resident of Bpoh Loh Hta village in Papun District of Karen State displaying a homemade landmine planted in his fields by DKBA soldiers. According to reports, this mine, and many others like it, was laid by DKBA #333 Brigade soldiers operating under Commander Mo Kyo, but later lifted by KNLA soldiers. Fearing that more mines had been laid in the area, villagers in this area dared not return to their fields to harvest their rice. [Photo: KHRG]

## 4.9 Burma-India Border

Unlike Thailand and Bangladesh, India has not yet acceded to the Mine Ban Treaty, and appears to have no immediate plans to do so, citing “*legitimate security concerns*” over the “*humanitarian concerns*” for their continued failure to do so. India is estimated to possess a stockpile of between four to five million landmines, though its actual size remains unknown.<sup>91</sup>

The Burmese side of the border in Chin State is particularly heavily contaminated with landmines, with the vast majority of these being deployed by SPDC army soldiers. Following similar patterns of deployment as those observed along Burma's eastern frontier (see above), landmines are often deployed against opposition forces as well as against civilians who are thereby displaced from their homes, and face danger in fleeing across heavily mined territories as they look for a safe haven. Tonzang, Thangtlang and Paletwa Townships remain among some of the most extensively mined regions along the border.<sup>92</sup> Unfortunately, limited information exists on the extent of landmine contamination in Sagaing Division and Kachin State.

The Indian side of the border also suffers from landmine contamination owing to the continuing armed conflict being conducted there, particularly involving the Kuki ethnic group whose geographic distribution straddles the border. It has been alleged by both the Indian government and armed opposition groups that the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), a non-state armed group operating in Manipur, had deployed landmines in the border region during 2007. In March 2007, Burmese Kuki living in the border region protested against the use of landmines in Manipur. Following this, UNLF soldiers had allegedly forced the Burmese Kuki villagers back across the border into Burma, with the support of SPDC troops.<sup>93</sup>



This photograph shows civilian Karen villager Aung Kyaw Soe, from Than Daung Township in Toungoo District, Karen State receiving a below-the-knee amputation from Karen medics after he stepped on an SPDC army landmine in February 2007. [Photo: FBR]



## Endnotes

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- <sup>25</sup> Source: *Ibid.*
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- <sup>30</sup> Source: *Landmine Monitor 2007*, ICBL, October 2007.
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