

Inside News

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"Burnt from
our land..."

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE COMMITTEE FOR INTERNALLY DISPLACED KAREN PEOPLE (CIDKP)



Saw Ba Oo Gyi
The father of the Karen resistance

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Cover picture: Phil Thornton

Resisting the regime

As we go to print, the Burmese government continues to force Karen villagers from their homes. In the north of the state as many as 18,000 have been made homeless and hundreds of villages have been destroyed.

These people are now at great risk from malaria, worm infestations, dysentery and dengue fever. Schools have been destroyed, smashing the future hopes of many children. Their crime – being Karen and refusing to obey Burmese army orders to force relocate. The Burmese government continues to ignore calls for it to stop its homicidal attacks on the Karen and other ethnic Burmese people. Burma's record on just about anything is appalling.

The pariah government of Burma tops yet another international blacklist—this time one compiled by the inter-governmental Financial Action Task Force set up to tackle money laundering and terrorism financing.

Corruption in Burma is rampant at every level of government. Children have to pay for their education at every step – for books, for application forms and even for tuition.

The World Health Organisation ranks Burma's health care system as the worlds second worst after Sierra Leone. A third of children under five suffer severe malnutrition. Burma is still the world's second biggest producer of opium and the largest manufacturer of amphetamine-type stimulants.

The regime has jailed more than 1,000 political prisoners. NLD leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, is still under house arrest – her crime – Burmese people like her. The US and its allies and the UN have sent troops to combat dictators and armed militias in Bosnia, Serbia, Somalia, the Congo, Darfur and Iraq—just to name some—but have left Burma's military dictatorship off their intervention agenda. Why?

Burma's human rights record should be motivation enough for the UN Security Council to take immediate action. If Burma is to be freed it needs not only the intervention of the UN but the Burmese people must keep resisting the military despots attempts to control them.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

If you want to find out how you can help internally displaced Karen people: email kidpc@cscoms.com - hlahenry@hotmail.com or write to CIDKP , PO Box 22, Mae Sot, Tak 63110, Thailand.



Burmese army has Karen schools in its sights

According to a report by the Thai Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) there are as many as 150,000 displaced people in Karen State. Many of these people have been forced to abandon their villages and now live in basic jungle homes with few amenities or services.

Saw Benny from the Karen Education Department (KED) says the latest Burmese army offensive in northern Karen State has forced many schools to close in spite of the Karen peoples' determination to have their children educated.

The increased military operations in early 2006, especially in Doo The Htoo District (Thaton), Taw Oo District (Taungoo), Kler Lwee Htoo District (Nyaunglebin) and Mu Traw District (Pa Pun) are so intensive, thousands of students have been forced out of school.

Saw Benny says parents either move or send their children to the Thai-Burma border hoping their children can get a better and higher education.

"Many displaced students want to learn, but they have less chance because they are constantly forced to be on the move. The schools have to move to another hiding place after been set up in one place for many years. Children have to help their parents farm or care for younger siblings. This is a tragedy for Karen children who can't study."

Getting an education in these circumstances is difficult, but Karen villagers are determined that their children are given a chance.

Saw Benny says in 2005 there were 855 schools in seven brigades for internally displaced people.

"Student numbers reached 48,855 and were taught by 2,266 teachers. Our people want schools. Our children want to learn but many obstacles are placed in their way. Now Karen students are not allowed to learn their own languages."

Saw Benny explains that schools at Htee Kya Ra and Htee wah Blaw in Pa-an District are under the control of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and curriculums introduced by the government are all in Burmese.

"To be able to learn their own Karen languages students have to pay for expensive school materials and pay taxes and bribes to authorities and officials."

According to Saw Benny, Karen parents not satisfied with the quality of education inside Burma try to find a way for their children to get a better education.

"For education in Karen State to improve and to include higher grades, KED workers will set up a school for teacher training and provide much needed school materials."

Saw Benny, a proud advocate of promoting education among his people says that one day, he hopes Karen people will be able to have access to schools and universities as enjoyed by most other nationalities.



Resisting the enemy

Karen villagers who hide in jungle hideouts do it to avoid Burmese army soldiers and to try to remain in their traditional lands. Many villagers have had their homes destroyed, their spouses arrested, crops burnt and animals killed and still they refuse to leave their traditional lands.

The army has issued relocation orders and taken people as forced labourers. To resist and to refuse to obey these orders is often a jail or a death sentence.

Villagers take to the hills and jungles and become refugees in their own country. They set up schools, clinics and makeshift villages. They live in fear of Burmese army attacks.

Naw Iris who works with the Committee for Internally Displaced Person (CIDKP) says.

“For IDP’s to be able to get relief they rely on help from the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP), Karen Office of Relief and Development (KORD), Karen Education Department and Health and Welfare Departments. Naw Iris says people get one tin of rice (16 kgs) per person per month. “Before they used to receive rations for two months but now they get it for three months.

Naw Iris says the main difference between an IDP in Burma and refugees in Thailand is security.

“Refugees in camps get secure shelter. IDPs are at the mercy of the weather and Burmese army attacks. This makes it hard

to get food and medicine to them as they have to keep changing their hideouts.”

Naw Iris says refugees get rice, salt, fish paste, chili, cooking oil and beans, IDP’s rely on rice as their main food.

“With minimum protein and no salt, people’s immune systems become weak and they contract disease easily.”

Naw Aye Paw is from Mon Township, Nyaunglebin district in is one of 540,000 IDP’s living rough in Eastern Burma.

“When we ran, three pregnant women who had just given birth ran with us. One of them had to be carried. When we stopped we could not make a fire because the Burmese soldiers were close to us. We could not get help for the woman and she died.”

Naw Aye Paw says Burmese soldiers enter villages and burn, loot and force people out of their homes.

“Villagers living in the jungle, especially children and the old people get malaria, dengue fever and other ailments. It is hard to get them to a clinic as there are many army checkpoints.”

Naw Aye Paw says as a displaced person she wants the Burmese army to honour the ceasefire and stop taking villagers by force to work for them.

“It’s time we IDP’s went home to our villages.”

Landmines have no friends

Burma is one of the worst countries in the world for landmine use. Nine out of 14 states and provinces in Burma are sown with landmines, making large swathes of land worthless for cultivation and killing and maiming thousands of people. As a result, many people have lost their lives and suffered horrendous, disabling wounds.

A Mine Risk Education program run by DCA and the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People taught trainers to teach villagers about the dangers of landmines and other unexploded ordinances.

Students learnt how to use Global Positioning Systems (GPS), how to draw maps and first aid in case of an emergency. They also learnt how to write field reports as well as document mine victim cases.

As soon as the training finished, the 20 trainees took their new skills into the field. Margie, a trainee, went to Doo Playa and Hpa-an districts and told *Inside News*.

“We instructed villagers not to touch landmines. Many are not sure what to with mines. We told them not to collect mines or unexploded ordinances for scrap metal or to make tools from.”

Margie says some villagers have tried to catch fish or animals by using mines.

“Mines are unpredictable, they're mine built with a device that causes it to explode at the slightest touch. We showed villagers that if they know that landmines are planted in their area they should make warning signs.”

Margie says even in conflicts, the needs of the civilian population need to be considered.

“Taking time to plan warnings actions pays dividends. Our group went to six villages —Bah Htar, Noe poe, Htee moo Hta, Mai Ka Nai and Tha Blu Kho Khee. As many as 450 local people attended the mine risk education.”

Margie says land mines are planted either by Burmese army soldiers or the Karen army. But she says there is a difference in the way both sides use them.

“When the Karen army use landmines they let the people know about it. They warn the people not to go to the places. The number of people killed or wounded by Karen landmines is few. The Burmese army use landmines against the people in rice paddies and on village paths.”

Mae Tao Clinic treated 10 mine casualties between April 2005 and April 2006 says Saw Billy Htoo, a medic at the Clinic. Handicap International reported 53 mines casualties on the Thai Burma between January 2004 and February 2005. The total number of mine victims or survivors in Burma remains unknown.





Life on the run

Many Karen families are shattered when Burmese soldiers attack their villages. To avoid getting killed, tortured or raped people run to the jungle. Often families are split up in the chaos. Families lose fathers to the army as forced labourers - some don't survive the beatings or the heavy workloads. *Inside News* spoke to survivors who recently survived an arduous trek of up to a month to reach safety on the Thai Burma border. Naw Han Ku Paw, 28 was widowed in 2003. She has three children and now lives at Mae Ra Moe, refugee camp in Thailand. She feels she has no one to turn to for help except the Karen elders who run the camp. Her parents died when she was a child and Burmese government soldiers killed her husband.

“The soldiers asked my husband to guide them through jungle paths. They also forced him to carry heavy loads. When he returned home he was sick from the beatings. He vomited, threw up blood and died the next day.”

Naw Hay Nay Tha, 30, is also widowed and has three children and is living at the new internally displaced persons camp, Ei Tu Hta on the Burmese side of the Salween River.

She says Burmese soldiers tortured people in her village. “No one dared to live in the village. We ran to the jungle. My husband was sick and died in the jungle without medicine.”

Naw Hay Nay Tha cries and says she does not know what to do.

“I have three children and another due in a month. I will have problems in the future. I know I have to endure the hardship in the world. I am unfortunate.”

The back breaking forced labour is not only for men, but women and children are also used.

Many thousands of villagers have fled Karen State in recent months as the Burmese army has increased

...see page 7



Mission to Destroy

Hundreds of battered Karen villagers are fleeing to the Thai border following Burmese army attacks against them in Eastern Burma. Phil Thornton reports from Karen State.

Naw Sha Paw, 60, is bruised, tired and fed up. She is one of the 900 Karen villagers hiding from the Burmese army in a makeshift camp on the edges of the border between Burma and Thailand. She's frail and in need of more medical help than a young Karen medic can offer.

"I walked more than one month to get here. My whole body aches. I only had my two legs to get me here. I've got chest pains, legs pains and I've had dizzy spells for more than a week."

Naw Sha Paw is angry. Just over a month ago she had her six grown-up children around her and her beetle nut garden to enjoy.

"I had a small, piece of land. I could grow what I needed. The Burmese soldiers came and cut down my fruit and nut trees. They were more than 12 years old and in five minutes they were all gone."

This is not the first time Naw Sha Paw has felt the brutality of the Burmese regime. In 2001 they came for her husband. Remembering makes her thin body shake. She stops talking, swallows hard and fingers grey hair strands off her face. Naw Sha Paw face is a map of her pain. It's

can't be easy telling a stranger how soldiers took her husband. "They tortured him. They tied a log to his back and put him in the river until he died. I cried for seven days, I still do. I miss him, but what can I do. These men are not brave. They're dangerous like cobras. They can't be trusted."

Naw Sha Paw says the soldiers smashed her home and thrashed her land.

"We grew fruit trees, mango, banana, jackfruit and beetle nuts. We caused no harm, we're villagers. I don't know why they hate us, but they do. We stayed in our village, but still they kill us."

Rain clouds darken the sky, an ominous warning to the young medics and camp workers that the monsoon is close. Heavy rains will bring additional problems to these hurt people. Getting into the camp from the river is now a kilometer hike up a narrow ankle deep stream. In a month it will be a raging monster capable of drowning children and adults alike. Meanwhile, clinics, huts, latrines and walkways need to be built and everything has to be carried in. In a makeshift hut that's as much bamboo as it is blue plastic sheeting, senior backpack medic, and emergency care worker from the Karen Health Department, Hsernai Moo, declares the people's plight a medical emergency.

"We have nearly 100 cases of malaria, women and children are malnourished, and diarrhea is a big problem, as is

dysentery. Many of the children have worms. They've been on the run for months eating what they could scavenge from the jungle."

A feeble cry from a sick baby distracts Hsernai Moo. He walks to a small bamboo platform and bends over a small child being fanned by the mother. He checks the IV bottle tied to a bamboo pole and says the child has meningitis.

"She's seriously ill, but she will survive. Our people urgently need security, I'm afraid for their future welfare."

Hsernai Moo is worried the Burmese army will attack the camp in attempt to stop the people telling their stories to the outside world.

"We're caught here between two Burmese army camps. Soldiers are only a two hour walk from here and there's more people on their way to us."

Hsernai Moo's concerns are real. International human rights groups classified these latest Burmese army attacks on Karen villagers as the worst since 1997. A report on internal displacement by the Thai Burma Border Consortium states that as many as 540,000 people in Eastern Burma have been displaced by war or human rights abuses. Another 155,000 people live in refugee camps along the Thai Burma border. KNU general secretary, Pado Manh Sha says the attacks have violated the verbal ceasefire agreement between the KNU and the regime.

"We're angry, we want peace, but not at the cost of justice for our people. These attacks are against civilians not Karen soldiers. They have total disregard for international law."

Mahn Sha says the latest offensive are part of the Burmese army's 'Four Cuts' (*Pya Ley Pya*) campaign used against the Karen since 1969 to cut off food, money, information and recruits to the KNU.

"They kill, burn and torture our people. It is a scorched earth policy where villagers are forced from their homes, their villages landmined and they're shot on sight if they go back."

Mahn Sha says whole districts in Eastern Burma have been locked down. Villagers cannot get in or out to tend their crops or buy supplies.

Thailand, separated from Burma by the dark waters of the Salween River, could be on different planets, the gulf between them is so stark. Burma's education and health system was once the envy of its neighbours, but decades of military rule and corruption has driven it into the ground.

Small Thai border towns, glitter with consumer goods in comparison to the paucity and drabness of its Burmese counterparts. Thailand's infrastructure,

education and health care systems are beyond comparison with Burma where dirt tracks now pass as roads.

Meanwhile back in the camp a few small boxes of donations arrive. They are listed in a schoolchild's exercise book: "two hammers; spirit level; three hatchets, 20 kilos of nails, one shovel, 100 mosquito nets, 80 mats".

Men hurry to build a new clinic and delivery room before the heavy rains start. Inside the bamboo and plastic sheet room that is now the birthing ward Naw Kwe La Paw (Flower of Hope) proudly cradles her newborn baby, Naw Htee Wah Paw (White Water Flower) and tells of the journey she took with 300 hundred other villagers.

"It took us three months to get here. We walked mainly at night, we had to wait up to 24 hours to cross roads guarded by the soldiers. It was hard. My hands, knees and feet still hurt. I was worried about my two children. They were sick with diarrhea and dysentery. They had fevers and we had no medicine to give them."

Naw Kwe La Paw says staying in her village was not an option. "They stole our chickens, pigs and burnt down the village. They stole our paddy [rice]. If we didn't have the help of the Karen army we'd be lost. They took care of us."

And if the negative results from recent international pressure from alliances on the regime, such as ASEAN, is anything to go by it may be some time before the Karen of Burma can expect any relief other than what their own people can offer.



photo-FBR

New rules --- same old orders

In spite of Burmese government denials to the contrary, the Federation Trade Union of Karen (FTUK) has documented evidence of increased cases of forced labour since the Burmese government moved its headquarters from Rangoon to Pyimana in January 2006.

The FTUK say many Karen villagers in Taungoo and Nyaunglebin districts are forced to do unpaid work for the Burmese army. Forced labour tasks include carrying military supplies, building roads and bridges, clearing landmines and cutting bamboo and wood for the construction of army camps.

The union claims that villages are forcibly relocated to concentration camps where government troops can strictly control people.

“Currently one of the biggest concentration camps is Taike-Tu camp in the Kyauk-Kyi Township in Nyaunglebin district. Over 700 families were involved - an estimated 7000 people.

The FTUK says the army’s objective is to control the people in Kyauk-Kyi area and to stop contact between villagers and the Karen National Union.”

The union named Major Zaw Tun as the officer in charge of Light Infantry Brigades (LIB) 439 and 351 that relocated villagers to Taike-Tu between April and May, 2006.

The FTUK claims villagers were told to say that the KNU ordered the relocation and not the Burmese army.

“Every house had to be dismantled and transported along with all their possessions to the new location by oxcarts within a month. It is believed that these actions were to cut the communication between KNU and the Karen people. But churches, Buddhist temples and government schools were not allowed to be moved.”

In a move designed to cause division the relocated people were ordered to set up their houses on farms belonging to Taike-Tu villagers. But to add insult to injury, villagers were forced to pay 15,000kyat to the military officers as compensation for the land.

FTUK says the military controlled all aspects of the relocation --- position of lanes and housing sites and the restricted size of the housing blocks.

“Under orders, families were made to construct lanes and rebuild their houses, plant bananas and castor oil plants. Families were required to buy a toilet from the military officers for 3000 kkyat for each housing block.”

The union says a sign at the entrance to the new village reads: ‘WARM WELCOME TO TAIKE-TU DEVELOPMENT VILLAGE’.

“Villagers built two schools but the military staffed the schools with government teachers and will only teach the government curriculum. Karen subjects are forbidden. Villagers were also ordered to build a clinic but there is no medicine or staff to run it. The relocation site has no water supply and villagers are forced to dig wells to find water and buy hand pumps from army officers. To date, no suitable drinking water has been found as yet.”

The FTUK says villagers have been forced to construct a road from Taike-Tu to Kyauk-Kyi, a distance of seven miles, for the army.

“The government has supplied nothing. There are only a few small shops in the camp with supplies limited to betel nut and a small range of fruit and vegetables. To work their old farms villagers have to make a daily trip of three to four miles. They also need to buy from the army officers a weekly pass costing 1000 kkyat.”

The union says villagers have to get permission for any form of travel. Work and food gathering are only permitted during daylight hours and they must remain under curfew in the camp every night.

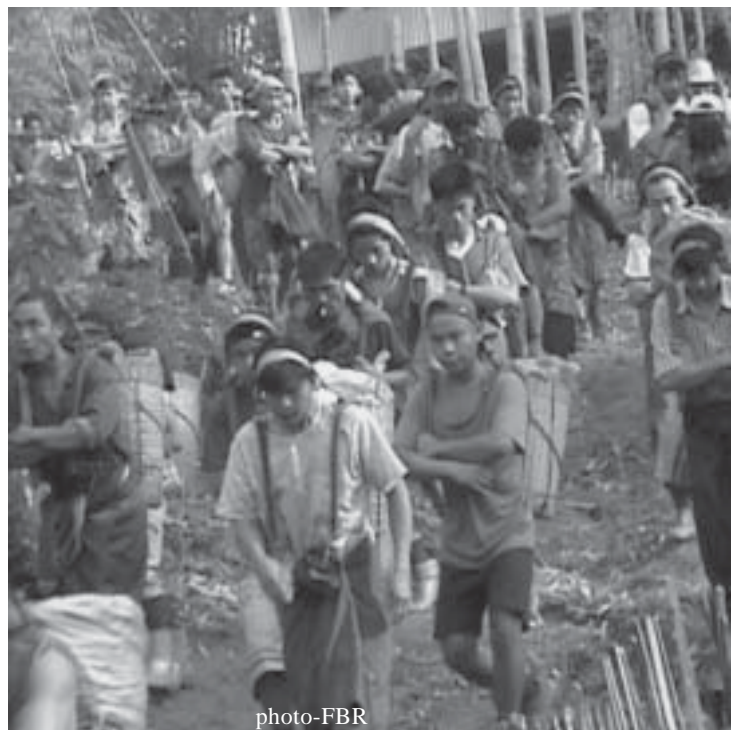


photo-FBR

Burmese army force 850 villagers to porter



photo-FBR

Walk of fear

Naw Paw Gay, 50, is from Taungoo District and says she is an ordinary woman who enjoyed her work in a plantation before the Burmese army attacked her village.

"The Burmese army arrested me, three of my cousins and one of my sons. We weren't questioned. They just put us in prison for six months. We were locked up in a dark cell and didn't see any light. We didn't do anything to deserve this."

Naw Paw Gay says in prison she wasn't alone.

"There were many other ethnic people. Hundreds of people, without any wrongdoing, were arrested and put in prison."

While in jail Naw Paw Gay worried about her sons, daughters and grandchildren.

"I thought there would be no one to feed them or take care of them".

Naw Paw Gay thinks that the Burmese army may have suspected that she had contact with her brother in Thailand and that's why she was put in prison.

"My son, Saw Pha Nu was put in prison and was beaten and tortured by the soldiers. He died from his injuries three months after his release.

Naw Paw Gay's husband died six years ago and she had to work very hard to earn living. During the recent military offensive the Burmese army restricted villagers movements, burnt houses, destroyed cooking pots and killed animals.

Naw Paw Gay says in the end she couldn't stay and had to flee to border for safety. She is now living in Ei Tu Hta camp on the Burmese side of the Salween River.

The journey to the border was fraught with danger.

Naw Paw Gay's aunt and uncle were caught and shot dead by the Burmese soldiers while they were gathering vegetables in the forest.

"I heard the scream of my aunt after the shooting but not my uncle. My uncle couldn't make any sound, after he was shot he went silent."

Naw Paw Gay resisted the Burmese army as long as she could.

"They oppresses us and try to eliminate all our people. My husband was beaten until he lost all his teeth. The Burmese soldiers tied his arms behind him and punched him to death."

It took Naw Paw Gay two weeks to walk to Ei Tu Hta from her village. She came together with 17 people.

"We caught colds, fever and malaria. We had to walk at night to avoid the Burmese army. If they saw us they would arrest us, torture us and kill us".



Name- Saw Lah Say

Age- 18 years old

Parents - Naw Saw Wah and Saw Moo Say

Saw Lah Say was born at Au Pot Khee village in Karen State. He has five brothers and he is the youngest. His parent's are hill farmers. When he was five his mother sent him to school, but it did not last long as Burmese troops attacked his village and they had to live in a jungle hideout.

Although Saw Lah Say lived in a jungle he continued to study until he reached fourth standard. He then went to Nyaunglebin to complete fifth standard. After that he went to Panar Wa Kwee.

Burmese troops came to his village and opened fire killing his older brother and his friend. Two villagers were also wounded. Villagers scattered in different directions.

Saw Lah Say fled alone until he met with Pa Doh Naing Htoo who he stayed with for a few days.

With Pa Doh Naing Htoo's help he found his family who thought he had died in the burning village.

A year later, the family realised that they could no longer safely stay in their village and in May 2000 moved to Ban Salah Refugee Camp. Saw Lah Say now had his chance to attend school at nearby Mae Rae Moo camp.

Currently he is studying Ninth standard and hopes to pass 10th standard next year. People asked him, "don't you want to go abroad to school?"

Saw Lah Say says if he has an opportunity to go abroad he would like to go and study there.

"I don't want to stay there for ever. I don't want to stay far away from my parents."

He says that one day if his dream comes true, he would like to stay together with his parents and serve the Karen people.

"I will serve my people as much as I can."

"We want justice!"

The Burmese army lockdown in northern Karen State has forced 18,000 villagers from their homes. The army destroyed hundreds of homes, stole possessions, killed livestock and burnt food stores. Soldiers land-mined and booby-trapped homes, rice fields and village paths. Roads were blocked; preventing villagers from tending to their crops, buying supplies or sending children to school. Families were left with little option, but to take refuge in jungles or attempt the difficult journey to the Thai border.

The Burmese regime in an bizarre attempt to confuse the situation and the international community blamed the exodus on the Karen National Union. But nobody bought the deceit. International media outlets sent television crews and journalists to report on the villagers' story.

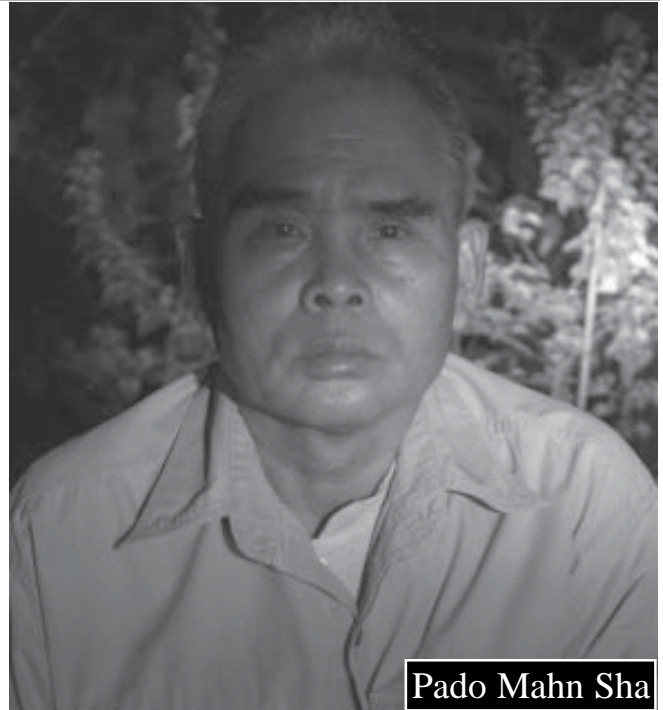
The UN human rights envoy for Burma, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, urged the Burmese regime to "urgently" stop military operations against civilians in northern and eastern Karen State.

The respected newspaper, *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported the following.

"Two aggressive diversionary campaigns are now being waged by the regime. Amid the economic turmoil, the junta is targeting Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy and the ethnic Karen National Liberation Army, which has been fighting a war for autonomy since 1947. Militarily, in the past month it has burnt Karen ethnic minority villages, blocked food supplies into the mountain villages east of Pinyinana, beheaded at least one villager, and driven thousands of new refugees to join those already in camps on the Thai border and other neighbouring countries."

In spite of the international condemnation it was business as usual for the regime. They continue to wage war against the ethnic people of Burma.

The KNU general secretary Pado Mahn Sha told *Inside News* that the Karen people want the international community to intervene and to push the regime to a genuine peace for the people of Burma.



Pado Mahn Sha

"We want justice, we want unity and we want peace." Mahn Sha says the military dictatorship targets civilians.

"They attack innocent villagers, these people are civilians not soldiers. They [Burmese army] know they're breaking international laws, but don't care. They're killing and torturing our people."

Mahn Sha claims the time of dictators is over.

"We live in the 21 century, it's time these Burmese generals made a genuine peace with the people. But we still need strong pressure from the international community to free the people of Burma."

Inside Burma: fear and repression

16,000 forced from homes as generals try to annihilate resistance

Tuesday May 23, 2006

The forces are...trying to eliminate the KNLA by starving it of money, food and recruits through the systematic razing of all Karen villages in the predominantly highland areas they do not control."

--- *The Guardian* (UK)

What the



“My people are in danger, of course I’m happy to serve. We all hope that one day this will stop and we’ll have peace. I’m a carpenter and farmer. I build boats that you see on the Salween. The river is my life – I’m a river man. Before I was forced to become a refugee I farmed. Sometimes what the army does to people scares me.”- Saw Bi



"The rainy season makes it difficult, but we will do it step by step. We’ve built a clinic, dug latrines, built a storeroom and put in water pipes. Many women are pregnant. We’ve had some miscarriages. We need more vitamins and fresh food. We have people from many religions here, it’s no problem we’re all ethnic people." - Saw Peter, Ei Tu Hta headman.



“I’m worn out. I came here with my five grandchildren. I’ve been an IDP all my life. We run time and time again.”
Naw Bway Hto, aged 60.



"I went to the jungle to find vegetables with my friends. We ran into an army patrol. We ran away and they shot me. I can’t use my hand, my fingers are locked (the bullet severed nerves in the arm that prevents him from opening and closing his fingers). I had to run away to the border. If the soldiers had seen my wound they would say I was a Karen soldier." - Saw Ladi

people say



“It took us three months to get here. It was a hard walk. There were 300 in our group. We carried rice with us, and a little bit of salt. We couldn’t carry much. We collected vegetables in the jungle. We worried about landmines. My children were sick. I worried. We got help from a KNU medic, but they could only do so much as many people were sick.”

- Naw Kwe La Paw

“I’ve been a nurse a long time. Our people don’t have much. These people don’t hurt anybody. All they want is a peaceful life and to care for their children. It’s important we serve our community, but we only have a little medicine.” - Naw Thet Paw (not in photo)



“Those who had enough food hidden away [for a year] stayed behind. Last year the Burmese army destroyed our rice crop and stole our rice store. They destroyed my plantations. If they left us alone we’d have enough food, we could after ourselves. They’re dangerous like a cobra...they can’t be trusted. I don’t know why they hate us, but they do.” - Naw Sha Paw, aged 60.

Report calls for increased aid to Burma

A new report released by Refugees International calls (RI) for outside aid to Burma to be increased. The report, *Ending the Waiting Game: Strategies for Responding to Internally Displaced People* [in Burma] argues that the “crisis in Burma has reached a point where displaced people and other vulnerable populations simply cannot wait any longer for outside assistance.”

Flying in the face of opposition to lifting sanctions the RI report claims US sanctions against the Burmese regime prohibit the delivery of much needed humanitarian help. Author of the report and advocate for Ri Kavita Shukla says.

“The Burmese people simply cannot wait for a civilian government to be put into power before the outside world comes to their aid. It is unconscionable to sit back and watch their plight without taking concrete measures to help them.”

In August 2005, the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria terminated its funding grants, totaling US\$98.4 million to Burma saying that the regime made it impossible to deliver aid to the people who needed it.

Other humanitarian groups trying to work in Burma quickly followed Global Funds lead. They included *MSF France* who in December 2005 claimed restrictions imposed by the regime had denied their staff access to villages. And the International Committee of the Red Cross announced on 27 February 2006 that the regime had closed down its prison visits.

Ms. Shukla says Refugees International does not “condone the regimes brutal policies” but are pushing for action that will help the Burmese people.

“The government of Burma is clearly not fulfilling its responsibility to protect and support its own citizens, but the world at large can respond to their needs without propping up the regime.”

Director of the independent Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) Kevin Heppner says US sanctions don’t stop humanitarian aid.

“It blocks infrastructure and investment, both of these are tied to land confiscation, forced labour and other abuses. Previous infrastructure aid has increased militarization, mass relocation and forced labour.”

Heppner says RI’s report is advocating giving aid to

groups operating with and in areas controlled by the SPDC. “In reality these agencies have no access to displaced people in ethnic areas. If they claim they are the most appropriate agencies to help these people it’s a lie. They have no access and the only way they’ll get it is if the SPDC bring these people under their [SPDC] control.”

Heppner makes the point that by giving aid to groups working in Burma it can only be used by complying with the regime and their overall strategies.

“People are displaced in Burma because they don’t want to live under SPDC control. It’s a mistake to think you can come in with aid as part of SPDC political control of a region and actually help people who are actively evading the regime’s control.”

Heppner explains that the main conflict is not between warring armed groups and the regime, but between the SPDC who want to control the daily lives of every Burmese person and segments of the population who refuse to be controlled.

“These people want to live their own lives free of the regime’s control. The people are not fleeing fighting they’re fleeing human rights abuses and forced labour done unto them by the regime.”



Caring for the people

Senior backpack medic, and emergency care worker from the Karen Health Department, Hsernai Moo, says the people's plight under other circumstances would be classified as a medical emergency.

"We have 80 percent suspected cases of malaria, women and children are malnourished from the trek to get here. Diarrhea and dysentery are big problem. Many of the children have worms. They've been on the run for months eating what they could scavenge from the jungle."

Hsernai Moo has been a medic for many years and says only peace will stop Burma's medical crisis.

"The Burmese government spends nearly half of its budget on its military and less than a \$1 per person on health and education."

What Hsernai Moo says about Burma's health system is supported by many international reports.

The World Health Organisation has ranked Burma 190 out of 191 countries, only Sierra Leone has a worst health care system.

International health organizations are dismayed at the lack of concern shown by Burma's military government to the life threatening diseases plaguing the country. A third of children under five suffer severe malnutrition. Malaria, HIV/AIDS, TB and malnutrition are now at epidemic levels. Burma's international neighbours are also concerned about the regime's lack of planning in regard to these diseases and to Avian influenza (bird flu).

Health care and planning is a low priority for the government, laboratories have been under funded and resourced and are incapable of coping with any disease outbreaks.



Hsernai Moo says he is concerned many of the children are at risk from dysentery and diarrhea.

"We are working on emergency medical relief. We are getting medicine from donors, but it is inconsistent. These people need security and care."

Burma: U.N. Must Act to End Attacks on Karen

"The U.N. Security Council must urgently respond to Burmese army attacks on ethnic Karen civilians that have displaced more than 10,000 villagers since November, Human Rights Watch said today. Civilians seeking refuge in Thailand have been placed at grave risk by landmines planted by the Burmese army along the border.

"The U.N. has just committed itself again to protecting civilians at risk, and thousands of Burmese are in urgent need of such help. The atrocious situation in Burma is exactly the kind of crisis the resolution was designed to address. Without swift and decisive Security Council action, the killings and abuses there will not stop."

— Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch (New York, May 3, 2006).

Protecting the people

Major Ei Tha's face is grim as he surveys the chaos of looking after 970 Karen people forced from their homes by the Burmese army.

"These are my people. I'm a soldier. There is only so much we can take before we will retaliate."

Major Ei Tha is a veteran soldier with the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and has put his own life at risk many times for his people.

"There's no ceasefire. We have a verbal agreement but they don't respect it, they never did. We don't have the arms to go on the offensive; we use our weapons to defend our people."

Major Ei Tha says the Burmese army used the ceasefire to try to bring the Karen people under the control of the military.

"We could do nothing. We avoided confrontation, but now if we see our people forced from their homes and tortured, we will attack. They treat us like animals to be hunted."

Major Ei Tha says the KNLA are renowned guerrilla fighters and are much better at this type of warfare than the Burmese.



"They don't have the same morale reason to fight as we do. If we get permission to attack, no problem, we can do it anytime. We've set up a line, if they cross it we will fight them."

Major Ei Tha says he's yet to see a good Burmese soldier. "They attack unarmed women and children. They torture the old. Soldiers should not do this. They try to beat our people into submission, but we won't surrender. If there's only one Karen soldier left we will continue our struggle."



Don't let our music die

Pa Da, 16, was born in Lu Pleh Township, Pa'an district northern Karen State. He was forced from his home by the Burmese army. Pa Da has a gift. He plays a traditional musical instrument called the *tanar* (Karen mandolin). He plays whenever he has free time. He has been playing the six string *tanar* for a few years now and says.

"We don't have cassette players to listen to or television to watch. I cannot read foreign books, as I understood none of the languages. Instead I play my *tanar* in the quiet of the jungle and it satisfies me."

Pa Da has no musical school to learn at. He learns by listening and watching others playing. He says everyone has a different style of playing so he has to adapt and create his own style.

"If you do not learn from someone, you can never play the *tanar*, Pa Da says picking up his six string *tanar*.

Pa Da says when the Burmese soldier attacked his village he could not take his beloved *tanar* with him.

"To run was enough. I put the *tanar* in the bushes and they found it and destroyed it."

Pa Da wants to play and sing professionally.

"I would like to sing and become a famous singer one day, but I am afraid no one would care to listen if I was a singer."

Pa Da's enthusiasm for the *tanar* is rare among young Karen says Saw Sain Tin Aye, a Karen elder living at Mae La Refugee

Camp. Saw Sain Tin Aye, 70, is renown for his efforts to preserve traditional Karen musical instruments and culture. He says that many "sayings" are now lost because people are unaware of them or do not know their meanings.

"If we lose too much of our culture it will be difficult to get it back." Karen elders like Saw Sain Tin Aye want to see their traditions preserved as they have been important for his people for hundreds of years.

"I would like the next generation to maintain this hereditary. I'm worried it will be lost to future generations."

One man determined to keep the music alive is Neh Neh, originally from Kyauk Pya village in Nyaw Lin Bin District, but now taking refuge in Ei Tu Hta camp on the Burmese side of the Salween River. Neh Neh, 28, was driven from his home by Burmese soldiers in May and says.

"When I ran, I had to hide my *tanar* in the jungle. If the Burmese soldiers saw it, they would have destroyed my instrument. I have not played music for two months. When I lived in our village I entertained visitors and villagers with the music."

Saw Neh Neh says he's desperate to learn more about Karen music and to develop and educate his community by playing music.

"Young people do not want to play *tanar*, but as I can play and now have time to teach them, I can help. If our people do not learn and preserve our culture it will be lost forever."