

4. Forced Portering and Labor

4.1. Background

In 1955, Burma ratified the ILO Convention No. 29 “Concerning Forced Labor,” in which it agreed to “suppress the use of forced labor or compulsory labor in all its forms within the shortest possible period.” The Convention defined forced labor as “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself (or herself) voluntarily.”

The widespread use of forced labor by Burma’s military junta is well-known internationally. In June 1995, the ILO Conference Committee on the Application of Standards cited Burma for its violation of ILO Convention 29 on forced labor. On March 27, 1997, the ILO established a Commission of Inquiry to investigate a complaint brought by workers’ delegates to the 1996 ILO Conference. The complaint addressed SLORC’s continued and active use of forced labor in Burma and its apparent unwillingness to repeal legislation allowing the use of forced labor. In September 1996, following an investigation of the country’s forced labor practices, the European Union Commission decided to withdraw Burma’s benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences.

Laws which permitted the use of forced labor were promulgated by the colonial rulers. To date, neither of the two most prominent forced labor laws has been repealed. Following independence in 1948, successive Burmese governments have continued the practice of forced labor, citing as legal authority the “*Village Act of 1908*” and the “*Towns Act of 1907*.” The two laws require that laborers be a) otherwise not employed, b) physically fit, and c) paid a reasonable fixed wage that is agreed upon beforehand.¹

In 1995, the ILO Governing Body stated that the “*Village Act of 1908*” and the “*Towns Act of 1907*” were contrary to Convention No. 29 and urged the SLORC to amend both Acts in order to bring them in accordance with the Convention

1 *In accordance with the laws and as stated by Burma’s Prime Minister, U Ohn Gyaw at the 50th Session of the UN General Assembly, the laborers must be paid from the time they leave their respective homes until they return, on completion of their duty. Apart from daily wages, they are entitled to receive rail and steamer traveling warrants or cash to cover the actual costs of transport between their homes and the work are. The respective military unit has the responsibility of providing accommodation, food, and medical coverage for the recruited laborers. Daily wages must be commensurate with those prevailing in the area. Workers are never required to accompany the troops to the actual scene of battle, nor are they to be exposed to danger. In the unlikely event of loss of life or limb, they or their families must be compensated in accordance with the Workmen’s Compensation Act of 1923.*

(i.e., ensure that the powers to impose compulsory labor be formally repealed and that those who use coercion in the recruitment of labor be punished). According to the Human Rights Report to the UN General Assembly (51st session), SLORC announced that both Acts were under review and apparently formed a board to monitor the review process and its progress. SLORC has stated that the authority given under the Acts were no longer exercised; they consider the laws obsolete since they were established under colonial rule and no longer correspond with the country's "new social order."

Whatever the status or use of these laws, overwhelming evidence shows that SLORC enforces a strict system of forced labor throughout the country. Of course, SLORC derides accusations of forced labor, stating that the concept of "forced labor" is inapplicable to Burma since its people are "voluntarily" participating in labor for the benefit of their community. In truth, tens of thousands of men, women, and children of all ages are forced each year to work without compensation at construction sites, army camps, as porters for the army, and -- this year -- on "tourist sites" as part of SLORC's "Visit Myanmar Year 1996" campaign. SLORC recruits forced labor by means of intimidation, coercion, and flat-out kidnapping. Laborers are taken away from their harvests and other forms of wage-earning only to go uncompensated for enduring weeks of hard labor. They are not even provided with basic necessities like food or tools. If a person refuses to work on SLORC's labor projects, he must pay exorbitant fines, pay a substitute worker, or worse -- he is beaten or killed. Indeed, beatings, rape, and even murder are common even if a villager agrees to cooperate with the army's round-ups.

The labor SLORC calls voluntary is the most degrading, backbreaking, and inhumane kind that exists anywhere in the world. Villagers used as porters must carry packs for the army that amount to half the villagers' weight. In conflict areas, they are sent ahead of troops to act as human mine sweepers or human bullet shields. Often SLORC sends children ahead to sweep for the mines to deter neighboring villagers from supporting SLORC's opposition. And this work is done without compensation. The porters are meagerly fed and sometimes not fed at all. If they get sick from disease, malnutrition, or exhaustion from their work they are offered no medical assistance and are often beaten and even killed.

Burma has ratified the UN Declaration on the Right to Development. Article 8 of the Declaration affirms "equality of opportunity for all in their access to basic resources, education, health services, food, housing, employment and the fair distribution of income." The development projects being undertaken in Burma have failed miserably to ensure the objectives outlined in the

Declaration on the Right to Development. In fact, the Rangoon-based U.S. embassy's Annual Report states that "the irresponsible and destructive development currently taking place in Burma is a significant source of human rights violations." The report further states that in FY 1994-95, forced labor to build infrastructure accounted for approximately three per cent of Burma's gross domestic product (GDP). During 1996, there were repeated allegations by many international human rights organizations that forced labor was being used on a project to build an oil pipeline across the Tenasserim division.

Forced labor on roads, railways, and other infrastructure is becoming even more prevalent as SLORC pushes forward with its "development" agenda. On these projects, SLORC usually sends written orders to villages demanding a quota of one or more laborers per household for shifts of one or two weeks; usually a family's turn will occur once per month on each project in their area (this is in addition to all other forced labor requirements as porters and at army camps). The villagers must provide their own tools and food or risk not eating at all. Children often perform forced labor because their parents must stay home to work the fields to provide some food for the family. Meanwhile, local battalions sap community finances and food where they are stationed.

No excuses are accepted for evading SLORC's labor requirements. If the adults in the household are sick or if the household consists of a grandmother caring for her orphaned grandchild, SLORC still requires that someone from the family go to the labor site; alternatively, the family must hire a substitute, the fee for which has increased dramatically over the last year. Sometimes, people can bribe a soldier by paying heavy fines or "porter taxes," but usually the only option is to send a laborer or flee the area and risk being captured and beaten. On some projects, the army assigns each village or family a specific work task; in these situations, parents often take their children with them so they can finish their work assignment as quickly as possible and return home. On major labor projects, such as the Ye-Tavoy railway line in southern Burma, families must send someone for two-week shifts every month; children as young as eight or ten years of age make up a large part of the labor force, particularly in the rainy season when the adults must work in the rice fields. Unfortunately, the rainy season is also when railway labor is the most brutal and mud embankments often collapse, killing workers.

It is abundantly clear that these laborers are not performing voluntarily; coercion and force are used to make people work on these labor activities. The "system" for recruiting labor is well-established. Typically, a local LORC commander contacts a village headman, or in urban areas, a council chairman, by written order. The order describes the number of laborers needed by a

certain date for a particular infrastructure project. Consequences of not fulfilling such an order are not explicitly stated, rather they are intimated through the enclosure of bullets, chilis, or pieces of charcoal that often accompany an order. The enclosures are meant to be symbolic of the consequences that await those who do not follow SLORC's orders; bullets mean they will be shot and killed; chili means they will be in "hot water" or that their animals will be cooked; and charcoal means that their village will be burned down. The village headman or council chairman is then in charge of choosing families to work on a rotating basis. Sometimes village headmen intercede or try to reduce the demands put on their communities, despite the implicit threats, but this can be fatal for them, especially in ethnic areas where -- if he did not cooperate with the army -- the headmen would probably be accused of aiding ethnic armed groups.

4.2. Types of Forced Labor

Forced labor takes three main forms in Burma: 1) villagers work as "porters" of supplies in war zones; 2) civilians work on construction or infrastructure projects; and 3) prison labor is used for work on construction projects and in war zones. In all three cases, people have no choice but to comply with SLORC's demands.

4.2.1. Use of Civilian Porters

The use of civilian porters is common in areas of armed conflict along the borders of Thailand, Bangladesh, and India where the SLORC army has regularly staged offensives against ethnic armed groups. Offensives occur regularly during the dry season, during which time civilians are taken from their villages and forced to endure dangerous and exhausting conditions. Porters are reported to have been rounded up by the military at home, at work places, and even at schools to carry military materials and other supplies for the SLORC troops. On many occasions, people are arbitrarily picked up off of the street and taken to areas where forced labor or military operations are in progress. Such kidnappings are quite random; some people have even been on their way to the market or attending the cinema in town when they were "recruited." Porters are taken by the army for periods of weeks and months (sometimes repeatedly). There is evidence that even elderly women and children have been used as porters.

The use of porters has become less common in recent years since fifteen ethnic

groups reached cease-fire agreements with SLORC, during which time the use of porters has slowed somewhat, but their use in areas where there is fighting continues. Both the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Karenni Nationalities Progressive Party (KNPP) have reported that the use of portering continues unabated as the SLORC steps up its military presence nearby.

Conditions for porters are horrendous. Porters are generally required to march over rough, mountainous terrain carrying heavy loads, including food stuffs, motor shells, heavy artillery, and cooking and general camp equipment for the troops. Porters for the military camps are also ordered to build bunkers, clear the surrounding area of bush and mines, carry water and supplies to the camp, and work recently confiscated fields for the army. Porters are given very little food if any at all. Daily rations of food are meager: on average, each porter is given one to two cups of cooked rice and an equivalent quantity of water each day. Sometimes, porters are not provided any meal for many days at a time. Physical exhaustion, malnutrition, and beatings often cause porters to become very ill or seriously wounded; SLORC does not provide them with medical care. Porters attempting to escape these atrocious conditions are killed or shot.

4.2.2. Use of Prison Porters and Prison Labor

The number of prisoners in Burma increased considerably after SLORC's coup d'état in 1988. Since then, prisoners, including political prisoners and student activists, have been used not only in the labor camps but as laborers at military bases. In 1996 alone, hundreds of pro-democracy activists were arrested and sent to prison. Often, political prisoners sentenced to less than ten years in prison are sent to prison labor camps across the country. Political prisoners are more likely to be subject to torture and mistreatment by prison officials. Political prisoners are often kept in solitary confinement and even manacled and chained for no particular reason.

According to eight prisoners who managed to escape to the Thai-Burmese border in late 1996, over 200 prisoners, along with local people, were used in the summer military operation in 1996 to carry supplies, food, and ammunition to the IB 19, LIBs 340, 341, and 434 -- all based in Papon township under the Southeastern Military command. These prisoners and other local people were forced to porter supplies several times from SLORC supply bases in Khaw Poke and Pa High to the military outposts along the Thai-Burmese border. Each trip required the porters to march 15 to 20 miles over rugged terrain. The porters were provided only a minute portion of rice each day. Due to the harsh working conditions, bad weather, and lack of food, many porters contracted

malaria and other diseases; no medical assistance was provided to them. Soldiers kicked those who were sick or weak and beat them with wooden sticks or their rifle butts. Three prisoners died due to the mistreatment. (Source: KHRG)

Labor camps for prisoners exist at the following sites:

- Kabaw Valley (Western Burma)
- Ywangan-Hanmyinmo Road (Sagaing division)
- Taungzun/Mopalin Quarry (Mon State)
- Pinlaung-Pyinmana Road (Shan State)
- Aungban-Loikaw Road (Shan-Karenni state)
- Shwenyaung-Namsan Road (Shan State)
- Myitkyina-Sumprabom Road (Kachin State)
- Myitkyina-Shibwe Lawkhaung Road (Kachin State)
- Rangoon-Mandalay Highway construction
- Yezin-Htonbo Quarry (South of Mandalay)
- Mergui-Kawthaung Road (Tenasserim division)
- Kawthaung Airport Extention (Tenasserim division)
- 30-Miles camp, Ye-Tavoy railway construction (Yebyu township, Tenasserim division)
- Zimba camp, Ye-Tavoy railway construction (Yebyu township, Tenasserim division)
- Bokeyyin camp (Tenasserim division)
- Tuntay camp (near Rangoon)
- Tuntay Piggery (near Rangoon)
- Phaunggyi Piggery (near Rangoon)

Establishment of *Win Saung* — Porter Battalions

As a result of the increase in the prison population since SLORC's coup d'état, and in order to cope with the shortage of prison facilities, SLORC has established six new *Win Saung* battalions (porter battalions). These *Win Saung* battalions are mainly used to create a ready supply of porters in the frontier; prisoners are kept ready for porter duties while working at the army battalions. According to eyewitnesses, the treatment of prisoners at prison battalions is barbaric, as one might expect. Only those prisoners who can afford to pay bribes (from 50,000 - 70,000 kyats) can avoid going to these labor camps. Ko Too and Ko Kan Saung, both from Ye-U township, Sagaing division, were

sentenced to three years imprisonment with hard labor for their political activities during the 1988 uprising. They were sent to a prison labor camp and died after brutal mistreatment and harsh working conditions, according to a local resident of Ye-U township. Currently, one porter battalion has been established in Myitkyina, Loi Kaw, Thaton, and Mergui townships, two have been established in Pa-an township. (*Source: ABSDF*)

4.2.3. Civilian Forced Labor

Civilians are forced to contribute non-compensated labor to large development projects throughout Burma. The projects include the construction of roads, railways, bridges, and gas pipelines. This year, there has been extensive use of forced labor in several railway construction projects relating to a natural gas pipeline. People living in villages near the various projects are continuously forced to contribute labor under the threat of reprisals. The poor conditions at construction sites have led to accidents and illness, sometimes causing death.

Forced labor is also routinely used to improve tourist facilities, including cleaning pagodas and renovating national monuments. This year, thousands of villagers have been forced to work on “beautifying” Burma in preparation for SLORC’s “Visit Myanmar Year - 1996” tourist campaign. Large local populations in tourist cities have been forcibly evicted to clear the way for tourist facilities; they have been relocated to satellite towns where malnutrition and appalling conditions prevail. At least 500,000 people have had their economic, social, and cultural rights abused during 1996.

The following is a partial list of 1996 forced labor projects:²

- Shardaw - Tatamaw road, Karenni State.
- Pa Thee Dam construction, Taungoo, Pegu Division.
- “Kanbawza Thadi,” or Bayint Naung Palace Project, Taungoo, Pegu Division.
- Cheroot-making Industry, Taungoo, Pegu Division.
- Sittaung River Basin project.
- Taungoo - Maw Chee road renovation project, Pegu Division and Karenni State.
- Mong Hsat Airport Project, Shan State.

- Mong Hsat - Mong Ton road, Shan State.
- Mong Hsat - Kengtung road, Shan State.
- Kyone Doe - Kawkeyeik road, Karen State.
- Kyone Doh - Nabu (15 miles long road) Karen State.
- Kyaw Ywa - Daw Lan - Nabu (10 miles long road) Karen State.
- Kawkeyeik - Nabu (20 miles long road) Karen State.
- Myat Padine - Nabu road, Karen State.
- Pain Kyone - Tukaw Koh - Nabu road, Karen State.
- Sein Gyi-Ta Ka Kloh - Chaung Wa village, Kya-in Township, Karen State.
- Way Sha - Than Ma Ya Taung road, ,Kawkeyeik township, Karen State.
- Pa-an - Shwe Bo - Kaw palaung - Mu Ka Wa - Kaw Tho- Mae Tha Laung road, Karen State.
- Pa-an - Shwe Taw motor-road , Karen State.
- Pa-an - Bee Tka via Pain Gone - Kyeh Toe Ray - Ye Bu, Karen State.
- Papun - Par Haik - Kyauk Nyat road, Karen State.
- Papun - Belin all-season road, Karen and Mon State.
- Kyar Ein Seik Kyi - Win Kat road, Karen State.
- Kyar Ein Seik Kyi - Taung bauk road, Karen State.
- Kyar Ein Seik Kyi - Baw Klo road, Karen State.
- Way Sha - Ko Lay Wah road, Karen State.
- Bawgali - Busakhee road, Karen State.
- Rangoon - Taungoo- Mandalay Highway renovation, Karen State.
- Htantabin - Zayatkyi road renovation, Karen State.
- Taungoo - Kawthede road reconstruction, Karen State.
- Kawthede - Busakhee road, Karen State.
- Nyaung Don - Patanaw road, Irrawaddy Division.
- Myaungmya - Latputta road, Irrawaddy Division.
- Pantanaw - Rangoon road, Irrawaddy Division.
- Nga Saw Sea Beach Beautification Project, Northwest of Bassein, Irrawaddy Division.
- Nga Saw - Tha Lat Kwa road, Irrawaddy Division.
- Kalay- Gangaw railway, Sagaing Division and Chin State.
- Kalay - Gangaw road, Sagaing Division and Chin State.
- Kabaw Valley Project, Sagaing Division.
- Modern Farm Project, Min Kin township, Sagaing Division.

- Kyauk O - Ye Poke Chaung embankment, Min Kin township, Sagaing Division.
- Kyauk O - Min Kin road, Min Kin township, Sagaing Division.
- Kalay - Tamu railway, Sagaing Division.
- Chaung U - Pakokku - Gangaw railway , Sagaing Division.
- Monywa - Ah Myint road, Sagaing Division.
- Homelin - Thamanthi road, Sagaing Division.
- Thamanthi - Laeshi road, Sagaing Division.
- Ye Chaung Dam Project, Sagaing Division.
- Thay Hydro Dam Project, Sagaing Division.
- Matupi - Haka road, Chin State.
- Haka-Gangaw 70-miles road, Chin State.
- Haka - Falam - Kalaymyo 115-mile road, Chin State.
- Haka-Matupi 173 mile road, Chin State.
- Haka-Tham Tlang road, Chin State.
- Paletwa-Kuah Daw road, Chin State.
- Matupi - Min Dat - Palatwa 137-mile road, Chin State.
- Khamti-Lahel road, Chin State.
- Zee Chaung Hydro Power Project, Kalay, Sagaing Division.
- Kin Tat sluice gate, Kabalu township, Sagaing Division.
- Chindwin River embankment Construction between Kyauk Methway pier and No.(34) saw mill, Monywa township, Sagaing Division.
- Strand road in the northern part of Monywa, Sagaing Division.
- Ye - Tavoy road, Tenasserin division, Mon State.
- Pyin Gyi - Kan Bauk road, Tenasserim Division.
- Pyin Gyi - Aindayaza road, Tenasserim Division.
- Aindayaza - Mi Chaung Lun road, Tenasserim Division.
- Aindayaza - Mi Chaung Ain Hpaungdaw road, Tenasserim Division.
- Theyet Chaung and Mergui road upgrading project, Tenasserim Division.
- Tavoy - Mergui road , running through Boke, Ka Pyaw, Aleh Chaung, Mazaw and Kyay Nan Daing, Tenasserm Division.
- Tagu - Ta Po Hta and Ta Po Kee 30-40 km-long road, Tenasserim Division.
- Mergui - Tenasserim- Boke Pyin - Kawthaung 300-mile-long road, Tenasserim Division.
- Nat Kyi Zin - Aindayaza - Three Pagodas Pass road, Mon State.

- Thanbyuzayat-Proh road, Mon State.
- Sittway -Rangoon Highway road, Arakan State.
- Buddha Museum Project, Sittwe, Arakan State.
- Maungdaw - Sittwe road, Arakan State.
- Maungdaw - Kyin Chaung road, Arakan State.
- Langkhur Wan Hart 18 mile-long road, Shan State.
- Wan Hart Zalawng 20 mile-long road, Shan State.
- Zalawng - Sop Taeng 20 mile-long road, Shan State.
- WanHart - Mawkmai 15 mile-long road, Shan State.
- Mawkmai - Sai Khao 20 mile-long road, Shan State

4.3. Incidents of Forced Labor by Region

4.3.1. Karen State

The most common forms of forced labor in Karen State are performing road construction, commercial logging, military portering, and building and servicing military camps. SLORC has begun an absolute binge of road-building in the area, most likely to create easy access routes to border areas where ethnic fighting continues. Tens of thousands of villagers from every village in Pa-an an District are being forced to build at least a dozen new roads and upgrading existing roads, creating military access throughout the region. The roads are being constructed wide enough for the military to transport heavy equipment into conflict-ridden border areas.

Road embankments need to be quite high through low-lying ricefields, requiring intense manual labor. Elderly villagers and children as young as ten years old are required to perform this backbreaking work. The villagers must perform all of the labor by hand; no machines are used, except in the rare cases where machines can be “hired” by the laborers. Many villages even have to rotate doing labor on two or three roads at once. Villagers are being forced to cover some of the roads with broken bricks or stones in an obvious attempt to make them “all-season,” but the embankments are only made of dirt and no proper drainage support is being built.

4.3.1.1. Papun District, Karen State

Since December 1995, SLORC orders have been issued to every rural village under SLORC control,³ to move either to SLORC army camps surrounding Papun⁴ or to DKBA headquarters at Khaw Taw (Myaing Gyi Ngu). This area is marked by rugged hills dotted with small villages, averaging ten to fifty households per village; estimates are that 100 or more villages may be affected by this SLORC order. SLORC units involved in the operation include LIBs 340, 341, and 434, and IB 5. DKBA soldiers are also involved in this SLORC order. In the past, DKBA soldiers operated in the area without SLORC, but villagers recently confirmed that DKBA soldiers never operate alone anymore. DKBA soldiers only appear in small groups as part of SLORC columns.

The detained population has been used regularly as porters, army camp laborers, and farmers for the military's profit. However, the primary use of the laborers has been on the construction of two roads: Papun-Par Haik-Kyauk Nyat and Papun-Bilin roads. Laborers are constructing the Papun-Par Haik-Kyauk Nyat road to give the military access to the border area and upgrading the 100 kilometer Papun-Bilin road into an all-season road. In order to upgrade the road, thousands of men, women, and children will be required to smooth the road and break rocks and gravel. The Papun-Bilin road has been washed out every monsoon season; SLORC forces the villagers to rebuild it every year. SLORC troops are anxious to construct an all-season road to give the military offensive capability in the region during the rainy-season. (*Source: ABSDF*)

In the north, the 100-km. Papun-Bilin car road is reportedly being graveled and tarred by villagers who have been driven into labor camps, and similar work is occurring on the 100-km. road from Thanbyuzayat to Three Pagodas Pass in the south. Work started in December 1995 to build a paved road from Pa-an an eastward to Pain Kyone, then southward to Bee T'Ka, most likely intended to continue southeastward to Nabu and Kawkareik and/or southward to Kyone Doh, for a total length of 60 to 100 km.. Since January, another paved road is being built southward from Pa-an an about 50 km. to Shwe Taw, possibly intended to continue to Moulmein or Mudon in Mon State.

3 This includes villages from Kyauk Nyat in the north to Ka Dtaing Dtee in the south, from the Salween River (at the Thai border) in the east to at least 10 km. west of Papun - an area 50-60 km. north to south and 30 km. east to west.

4 Including Papun, Kaw Boke, Par Haik, and Ka Hee Kyo camps - all located along the Papun - Kyauk Nyat road route.

4.3.1.2. Kawkareik township, Karen State

SLORC has been using civilians in Kawkeyik township for forced labor on road-construction projects, for at least nine months. Currently, roads are under construction from Kyondoe to Nabu, Kawkeyik to Nabu, Dawnan to Nabu, and Way Sha to Than Ma Ya Taung. Construction is being monitored by SLORC LIBs 545, 546, 547, 548, and 549. All family members from every village, with the exception of one person who is allowed to stay to care for the home, have had to report for work daily. Each of the three roads is approximately fifteen miles long. Each group is responsible for a section of roadway eight feet high, 60 feet wide and 1200 feet long; failure to complete the assignment results in a 1,200 kyats fine. There is no break in construction work even during the rainy season. Often, sections of newly constructed roadway collapse due to the heavy rains while the work is still underway. (*Source: KHRG*)

In addition to having to supply unpaid labor on the road construction projects, many villagers have had their land confiscated by the newly-arrived battalions. By order of Colonel Ye Htut, strategic commander, many plots of land have already been confiscated without any compensation. (*Source: ABSDF*)

4.3.1.2.1. Forced Labor on Way Sha-Tha Ma Ya Taung road, Kawkareik township

Way Sha village (also known as Quay Sha) is about ten miles north of Thingan Nyi Naung near Myawaddy. Than Ma Ya Taung mountain is about 4 miles west of Way Sha village. The location is a sacred site to local people; a pagoda sits on the mountaintop and Buddha's footprint is imbedded in a rock nearby a pleasant waterfall. The Myawaddy-district LORC Chairman, Colonel Maung Maung Nyaing, ordered the development of the location as a tourist site, probably to attract weekend tourists from Thailand once the Myawaddy-Mae Sot bridge is opened. He also ordered development of the waterfall to supply hydroelectricity to Myawaddy town and the Thingan Nyi Naung military base.

Village headmen from seven villages were ordered to oversee construction of a road from Way Sha to Than Ma Ya Taung in January 1996. Thousands of villagers are working on this project without compensation. Each family from each village⁵ is required to send one person, both to construct the road and to perform sentry duty, guarding the road at night. The embankment for the road,

⁵ Villages include the following: Tee Wah Blaw, Than Ba Ya, Ker Ghaw, Kyaw Ko, Lo Baw, Kwee Lay, Toh Thu Kee, Thay K'Tay, and Wah K'Lu.

about two feet high and thirty feet wide, is nearing completion. (*Source: KHRG*)

4.3.1.2.2. SLORC Battalions, Kawkareik township

At least six SLORC battalions have been stationed in Kawkareik township since 1995, including three new battalions, LIB 547, 548, and 549. All are stationed at Nabu village, about 15 miles north of Kawkareik town. In addition to forced labor on the roads, SLORC forces villagers from nearby towns to support all of these battalions. One Karen man interviewed in Thailand explained the tasks the villagers were responsible for: "We had to do almost all of the work for them [SLORC soldiers]. We had to clear the ground for construction, cut wood from the jungle, build army barracks, build fences, bunkers, and ditches, and perform sentry duty each night. We also had to tend to the rice fields and rubber plantations for the soldiers; each battalion has hundreds of acres of fields to tend and harvest. All of the villages surrounding Nabu have these responsibilities; we all work and we receive no compensation." (*Source: FTUB*)

4.3.2. Tenasserim Division

4.3.2.1. Palaw Township

SLORC has ordered each village in Palaw township to supply at least 100 pits of rock per village in order to upgrade the road between Theyet Chaung and Mergui into a fifty-foot wide road. A steep fine of 45,000 kyats is levied upon any village which is late in complying with the order or one that ignores the SLORC order. Assignments and fines are increased if a village is larger than normal. For example while Leik Thaung, Kyauk Lon and Wah Nwan Oak village were fined 45,000 kyats for not complying with the order. The bigger villages like Kyauk Kar and Pala village were ordered to dig 300 pits of rock or pay a 150,000 kyats fine.

Thousands of civilians and prisoners were used as porters from December 1996 through February 1997 in SLORC's military offensive operation against the KNU's 4th and 6th Brigade areas. SLORC is planning a new army outpost for LIB 280 and another battalion in Wah Nwan Oak, Taung Yar Gone, and Magyi Gone villages. Many farms were confiscated from villagers without compensation for the new army outposts. Twenty villagers have been ordered to provide free manual labor at the new outpost sites each day. (*Source: ABSDF*)

4.3.2.2. Tavoy Township

The SLORC has launched an annual sports program across the country in the hope that Burmese sports will be famous the world over. In December 1996, the 1996 Annual Students' Sport Festival was held in Tavoy. Local people and prisoners⁶ were forced to contribute unpaid labor to beautification projects including the repair of roads, throughout the region in preparation of the festival. Local SLORC authorities also ordered all town residents to repair and paint their homes, at their own expense.

In July 1996 alone, at least 100 prisoners from Tenasserim division were sent to Tavoy prison from prisons in Tenasserim Division to work on beautification projects, according to U Maung Aye, age 50, Mergui township and Ko Win Aung, age 26, from Launglon township. Both men recently escaped to the Thai border while laboring on a golf course project. The golf course project, just one of the beautification projects for the festival, was intended to provide entertainment for the SLORC officials while they were in Tavoy, according to the escaped prisoners. The prisoners described long working hours, insufficient food, and other ill treatment by SLORC soldiers while working on the golf course. (*Source: ABSDF*)

4.3.2.3. Tavoy-Mergui-Kawthaung road

The SLORC has been using forced labor since November 1996 on the Tavoy-Mergui-Kawthaung road. This road is ruined every rainy season; it takes forced laborers several months to rebuild it each year. SLORC is also constructing new roads with forced labor, including a forty kilometer branch of the north-south road running through Boke, Ka Pyaw, Aleh Chaung, Mazaw and Kyay Nan Daing (40 kilometers long) and a road from Tagu to Ta Po Hta and Ta Po Kee (about 30 to 40 kilometers long).

Almost every village along the Tavoy-Mergui-Kawthaung car road in the west and the Tenasserim River in the east, from Palauk in the north to Tenasserim town in the south has been relocated one or more times since September 1996. Villagers are being forced to move to the work-sites. Many of their houses have been destroyed to make way for the roads; the villagers have not been compensated. Sometimes, people located over fifty kilometers from their assigned work-site are forced to walk two days to perform their rotating shifts. The laborers work for periods of ten days hauling dirt, building embankments,

6 *Previously, only prisoners with long sentences were forced to work in labor camps, but now prisoners sentenced to as little as three months must work in prison labor camps.*

breaking rocks, and digging ditches. (Source: ABSDF/MIS-BKK)

4.3.2.3.1. Tavoy-Mergui Road

Several thousand villagers⁷ have been working on the reconstruction and extension of the Tavoy-Mergui Road every day since the beginning of 1996. SLORC local Infantry battalions 103 and 280 are supervising the road project. SLORC requires villagers from Tavoy and Launglon townships to complete the 51 miles of roadway from Tavoy to the 51-Mile point; villagers from Thayet Chaung township to complete the 15 miles from the 51-Mile point to the 67-Mile point; and villagers from Palaw and Mergui townships to complete the remaining 88 miles of roadway. Three thousand laborers from 31 small villages⁸ in Thayet Chaung township are working on the sixteen-mile-long section of the road (from the 51-Mile point to the 67-Mile point) alone.

The local SLORC battalions had officially agreed with their senior authorities to provide their own soldiers to work on the motor road repair and have been given advance payment by the SLORC for the part of the motor road repair. They agreed to implement the project without use of forced labor. But, in practice, the local SLORC battalions have forced the villagers under their control to complete almost all the work on the project by giving them very little or no payment. They promised the civilians that it would pay them 950 kyats per kyin of stones for gathering the stones and carrying the stones to the designated locations on the project, and 3,000 kyats per furlong for laying stones. The laborers have never been paid as promised, according to the local sources. Since they cannot disobey the orders given by the local SLORC battalions, the local people have had to contribute labor on the project whether they are paid or not. But, those households which could not contribute their own laborer had to hire a substitute laborer at a price of 150 to 200 kyats per laborer per day, or were required to contribute monetarily to the road at the rate of 2,000 to 2,200 kyats per ditch of stone.

4.3.2.3.2. Mergui-Kawthaung Road

Since 1991, 1,500 people have been working on the construction of the three

⁷ This reference includes Karens who have relocated there and the Burmese and Mons who currently live nearby.

⁸ The 31 villages comprise seven village tracts, namely Ka Twea, Ka Nyin Chaung, Auk Thayet Chaung, Pea Det, Kyauk Hse, Mayanmar Pe Orh, and It It.

hundred-mile long Mergui-Kawthaung road. Villagers from Palaw, Mergui, Tenasserim, Boke Pyin, and Kawthaung have been subjected to harassment and abuse by the SLORC troops from IB 17, 101, 103, 224, and LIB 433, 442, 358, and 343, assigned to oversee the project. At this point, only thirty miles of the road have been paved.

On February 23, 1996, Lieutenant-General U Tin Oo, SLORC Secretary - 2, summoned local authorities in Tenasserim division to Rangoon to issue updated guidelines and quotas for the Mergui-Tenasserim-Boke Pyin-Kawthaung road project.

Each household in each village was ordered to dig three earth ditches and three rock ditches during their two-week assignment at the work site. If a household could not fulfill its quota, it could pay 3,000 kyats to hire a substitute laborer or pay a fine of 6,000 kyats to local SLORC authorities. Villagers must supply all of their own food and tools, except for the concrete and nails provided by SLORC officials. Villagers living near the work-site are required both to provide unpaid labor and to pay taxes for the construction of the road. (*Source: ABSDF*)

4.3.2.4. Ye-Tavoy Railroad

Thousands of villagers have been forced to work on the Ye-Tavoy railway project every two weeks for several years. One twenty-eight year old man, who recently fled to the Thai border, reported that he had to work every fifteen days on the railway project at five different labor camps from 1993 until he was captured as a porter in April 1997. He did not receive any compensation during the entire four-year period. He had to bring his own food and tools to the labor camps. He had to build his own makeshift shelter. He saw many children as young as 12 years old and men and women over 60 years old working at the labor sites. If people tried to rest during working hours because they were sick or exhausted, they were beaten by SLORC officers. If a person did not finish his or her daily quota by 6:00 p.m., he or she had to continue working until the quota was completed. After 15 days at the camp, the laborers were told to walk back to their villages - a journey that took as long as two days.

The young man who reported these events was detained by police to work as a porter after a SLORC order was issued for volunteers and no one volunteered. He was kept in a prison cell overnight with 40 other detained villagers. The "prisoners" were not provided with food; they had to buy food from the

officers. The next day he was brought to LIB 25's base in Tavoy and kept in a warehouse with over 500 other porters. Again the porters had to buy food from the soldiers. They had to pay 20 kyats each time they wanted to use the toilet. The young man was then taken to Aik Wine, where he spent ten days cutting bamboo and coconut palm trees and building fences for bunkers and army barracks for LIB 17 and 25. After 10 days of work, he was ordered to accompany LIB 17. He had to carry food and other supplies for the soldiers, including heavy equipment. Along the mountainous route, he saw one porter die after being kicked and verbally abused by SLORC soldiers. The next day the young man finally escaped to the Thai border. (*Source: FTUB*)

4.3.3. Chin State

Villagers have been forced to work on the construction of a one hundred mile road connecting Kale Town and Phalam town since December 28, 1996 until it was finished in April 1996. U Khin Latt, President of Tun Zan township SLORC, under orders from Phalam-based SLORC regiment 268 and Tetain-based regiment 269, ordered one person from each household to report to work from the following villages in Tun Zan township: Hai Tuu, Tui Ton, Tan Twon, Phon Tong, and Phai Tun. Villagers must work at their expense; they are not paid for their labor, they must forgo their own harvests, and they must provide their own tools and food, usually boiled maize. Daily life in the villages is completely disrupted; even teachers from township high schools No. 8, 9, and 10 must perform forced labor, leaving the classrooms unattended. Despite their young age, many students under 16 years of age are forced to work at the site. Villagers endure terrible weather conditions at this mountainous site. Inexperienced in road construction, they are forced to perform back breaking work in rough wind. Each household must dig six ditches, 10 feet x 10 feet x 1 foot. About six groups of 300 people each work at the site on a rotating basis. Villagers must also collect large rocks for the road from Manipur Streams, three hours away. (*Source: ABSL-Information Unit*)

4.3.3.1. 1997 Students' Sport Festival

Local people from Haka township⁹ are being forced to work without pay on many beautification projects in preparation for the 1997 Annual Students' Festival in Haka, Chin State. Villagers have been forced to extend the football

⁹ Villagers from as far away as the Indo-Burmese border have been summoned to work on these projects.

grounds, build a new stadium, and construct and upgrade roads. Villagers must repair the Haka-Falam road, the Haka-Matupi road, the Haka-Than Tlang road, and the Haka-Gangaw road; they must also work on the construction of new roads. Such construction entails clearing the ground entirely of bushes and trees, leveling the ground, and working on construction. Chin State LORC officials have been forcibly collecting funds from the students for the sport festival since January 1996; each student must provide 20 kyats per month to the authorities. Villagers living along the road leading to the festival grounds were ordered to paint and repair their homes and any other buildings in poor condition. People in Haka have been complaining that they are left with little time or money to support their families. (*Source: CHRO and ABSDF/WB*)

4.3.3.2. Naga Region

The Naga region in Burma is underdeveloped and the local people still live quite primitively. SLORC's continuous portering requirements and forced labor on road construction and in support of nearby military outposts have created a miserable living situation for the Naga people. Local tribes, including the Naga, Shan, and Kuki, from 32 village tracts of Nyaungbinthar in Lashi township are being forced to construct the Khamti-Lahel road without compensation. It is common knowledge that the new road will provide for the easy transportation of military trucks and supplies in the area. The villagers have to perform difficult work with crude tools; they must crush and carry boulders and dig and clear the ground. Any household that failed to perform this duty was required to pay a fine of 1565 kyats to the No. 2 regional-based SLORC battalion.

SLORC troops are using many methods to exploit the "free" labor in the Naga region to support their military outposts. Naga villagers are consistently forced to work as porters any time the military deems it necessary. SLORC troops in the villages have to go and get their rations at Layshi town in the region. Local Naga villagers are ordered to work as unpaid laborers carrying rations for the troops. On the way, they are beaten when the troops are not satisfied with their work. Forced labor in the military barracks is also routine in the region. Naga villagers are ordered to perform cleaning, constructing, and cultivating work without pay in the military outposts or bases nearby their villages. Furthermore, the villagers are required to supply food for the troops. Every household in the village is ordered to supply two tins of rice and one chicken monthly and every village is required to give two to three pigs per month for the troops in their region. (*Source: ABSDF*)

4.3.4. Pegu Division

4.3.4.1. Bayint Naung Palace Project

In Taungoo township, SLORC is forcing people to work without compensation on the restoration of the ancient Bayint Naung Palace in conjunction with SLORC's "Visit Myanmar Year" campaign. In addition to their work, each household has been required to donate money on the palace project - from 150 to 600 kyats, depending on the size of the family. SLORC and USDA committee members, as expected, were exempt. SLORC has undertaken similar forced labor projects in Pegu division to lure more tourists into the country since 1989, including the ancient "Oaktha City" and "Hanthawaddy Ancient City." Many villages have been relocated without compensation due to these projects; once relocated, villagers are still required to perform forced labor and to pay additional taxes. (*Source: ABSDF*)

4.3.4.2. Pa Thi Stream Project

For the last five years, local people in Taungoo township have been forced to work on the Pa Thi Stream project two days per week. Villagers from Kyauk Tyne, Ngwe Taung Lay, and Khun Hint Mile villages are forced to build a dyke and dam the stream without compensation. They must also provide their own food and tools for the construction, according to a local villager who recently fled to the Thai border. (*Source: ABSDF*)

4.3.5. Sagaing Division

4.3.5.1. New Kabaw Valley Project -- the "Death Messenger Project"

In 1990, with the assistance of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the SLORC created a "border development" project in Kabaw Valley.¹⁰ While the SLORC publicly agreed to develop the border area for the benefit of local villagers, it has been using the UNDP financial assistance to underwrite its own military build-up. From SLORC's perspective, the New

10 Kabaw Valley, Sagaing Division, borders India.

Valley Project is in a strategic location; the project will allow SLORC to counter armed groups based in the region and to prevent any external invasion from India in the future. Furthermore, SLORC is using prison labor and luring villagers to the area to work on the associated projects under abominable conditions.

SLORC lures villagers from northern Burma with money and job opportunities to settle and work in the Kabaw Valley. Farmers from Shwebo, Monywa, Ye-U, and Pale townships are told that when they settle in the valley they will receive twenty acres of land, 5,000 kyats for a house, and farm tools and materials. New villages such as Aung Zay Ya, Ba Yint Naung, and Yan Gyi Aung were established in the valley. Shortly after they relocated, farmers realized they had been duped; they were forced to work without compensation or materials as “voluntary laborers” on construction projects related to the New Kabaw Valley Project. Hundreds of local people throughout the region are being forced to work under these terms on related projects. Despite the rough terrain and the spread of disease in the villages, people began to flee the new towns to escape the forced labor and inhumane conditions. SLORC’s office of Regional Control is monitoring the project from its base at In Thein Kyi in Kalay Township.

SLORC has established prison camps in the townships of Aung Zay Ya, Yan Gyi Aung, Watt Shu, Myo Thit, Tha Nan, Yar Za Gyo, and Sa Khan Gyi, Sagaing Division to provide a constant source of labor on the Valley project. Under the supervision of SLORC’s Prison Department and units of the Office of Army Regional Control, the camps are surrounded with three-layers of barbed wire. About 4,000 prisoners (mostly political), must stay under makeshift huts inside the prison compounds assigned to the Valley project. One recent escapee reported that between one and five prisoners die each week due to malnutrition, exhaustion, malaria, typhoid, and other diseases. Moreover, there is no medical attention available in the camps and in bad weather, fifteen to twenty people die in one day. The aforementioned escapee stated that half of the prisoners had either died or escaped the camps over the past four years.¹¹

The high incidence of deaths and escapes on the project caused a shortage of laborers, so SLORC summoned new prisoners from jails around the country, including, Insein, Tharawadi, Myin Gyan, Mandalay and Mon Ywa jails. Every six months between 1,000 and 1,500 prisoners whose jail sentences are more than one year are sent to the camps on a rotating basis. The only way a prisoner can escape being sent to the infamous Kabaw Valley Project is to

11 *The escapee was interviewed in Moreh by members of the ABSL.*

bribe jail authorities with between 25,000 and 30,000 kyats. The project has become so well known for its back-breaking work and the high occurrence of death and disease that the prisoners have renamed the project, the “death messenger project.”

According to a few escapees interviewed by the ABSDF, the prison camps have only one tractor to be used for plowing new land in all camps. The use of even this lone tractor is almost impossible however, because it is usually occupied by camp officials for their personal transportation. Therefore, the prisoners must perform all of their arduous work by hand and crude tools.

The prisoners must clear the area of trees, dig the earth, and clear the fields with makeshift plows. For plowing purposes, six feet long iron roles weighing 500 to 750 kilos are pulled by four prisoners. The prisoners are shackled while they work; they must work from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. with an hour break from 11 a.m. to 12 noon. There is no medical treatment available at the prison camps. Prisoners constantly suffer from malnutrition, typhoid, malaria, and skin diseases; they must try to heal themselves with medicinal leaves and fruits they might find in the jungle. Prisoners are allotted two changes of basic clothing. The clothing is poorly made and readily tears while the prisoners perform their strenuous tasks. Once their clothes disintegrate, they are not afforded any others. Often they dry their clothes in the sun while they wait naked. Prisoners are fed a meal of rice, watery pea soup and Ngapi.

One escapee, Koh Maung Maung Oo, aged 18, from Tavoy township escaped from Kan Gyi Village Camp in 1995. At the age of 15, he arrived at the camp after serving a year and a half at the infamous Insein prison in Rangoon. He had been sent to Insein when he was 14 year old. He had boarded a boat to Thailand thinking he could get some work to help his family. He soon discovered that the boat was a smuggling boat; he and fifteen others were arrested by the Burmese Navy. Many arrestees bribed officials to stay out of jail. Maung Maung Oo had no money for bribes and was sentenced to seven years in prison at Insein in 1992. He escaped from the Kabaw Valley prison camp in July 1995.

One civilian laborer who fled the project reported that approximately 3500 to 4500 prisoners died between 1990 and 1996 while performing forced labor for SLORC. The laborer reported that in March 1997 in Yar Za Gyow Camp on Kalay-Tamu road, a 12 year-old prisoner died as a result of beatings from camp officials. The child prisoner was accused of stealing pigeon pea, though the camp officials were known to smuggle the product out of the camp and blame the prisoners for the shortfall. Witnesses at the project have also stated that the

prisoners were often beaten until they were vomiting blood if they were caught eating any pea, even if it was unripened. Local people and prisoners have nicknamed this Border Area Development Program (BADP) the “UN-sponsored BAD program.” (*Source: ABSL*)

4.3.5.2. Yer Modern Farm Project

Thousands of local people in Min Kin township have been ordered to work without compensation at the Yer Modern Farm Project since early 1996. SLORC plans to turn the Nga Thaw Di swamp (situated between Mauk Kataw, Let Cheik, and Pin Tin villages) into 3,000 new acres of cultivable land with this project. As expected, the majority of the 3,000 acres will be used by the surrounding SLORC battalions: 1,000 acres each are allotted to SLORC LIB 364 and 366 and another 500 acres each are allotted for Min Kin Township USDA, leaving 500 acres for the local people. One person from each household in Min Kin township¹² is required to work daily from 6:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. Some village groups in the township were ordered to work and to pay taxes for the project; those households were required to pay between 350 and 700 kyats on four different occasions. (*Source: ABSDF*)

4.3.5.3. Kin Tat Sluice Gate

Local people have been forced to work without compensation on the construction of Kin Tat sluice gate in Kabalu township since late 1994. People must supply their own food and tools. They are not provided shelter at the worksite, rather they must stay in makeshift shelters while they labor on this project. During the past year, four laborers (two from Seik Khwe village, Shwe Botownship and two from Ye-U township) were killed when the earth collapsed while they were digging ditches at night. U Ko Lay, a retired secondary school teacher from Aung Zeya ward, Ye-U town, also died while working on this project.

People from Tant Se, Ye-U, Depeyin, Butalin, Shwebo, Atadaw, and Khin-U townships have been forced to dig ditches, build a canal, and construct the embankment for the project. Each household must provide one laborer for this project each week; if a household fails to provide a laborer, it is required to pay 100 kyats per undug ditch to the local SLORC officials. The primary job on this project has been digging ditches. Assignments vary with respect to

¹² There are 64 village groups in Min Kin township, Sagaing Division, comprising 188 villages.

SLORC's categorization of laborer. For instance, government servants are only required to dig two ditches. Ordinary family members from the villages must dig six ditches. (*Source: ABSDF*)

4.3.5.4. Min Kin township

Since May 1995, about 1,800 local people from six villages¹³ in western Min Kin township have been forced to divide their time between two forced labor projects, leaving little spare time to provide for their families. Villagers must contribute unpaid labor to both the two-mile long Kyauk O-Ye Poke Chaung embankment and the four-mile long Kyauk O-Min Kin road construction project. One person from each household is required to work one week per month on the embankment project. Anyone who can not fulfill the labor requirement personally must hire a substitute laborer at a cost of 75 kyats per day or pay a fine of 100 kyats per day to SLORC officials. Anyone who cannot afford a substitute or pay the fine is subject to beatings and torture by SLORC's local LIB 228. At the site, people are separated into groups of ten. Each group is required to dig a 5 x 49 x 6 foot embankment. One person from each household must toil on the Kyauk O-Min road construction project for one week each month as well. The work on this project is pure drudgery: the road is to be 6 feet high, 15 feet wide, and 4 miles long. (*Source: ABSDF*)

4.3.5.5. Extension of Chindwin River Embankment

Local people in Monywa township are being forced to work without compensation on both the Chindwin River embankment project (between Kyauk Methway pier and No. 34 saw mill) and the construction of Strand road in the northern part of Monywa. Each day, one person from every household in the township must work on both of these projects. Only those who can afford to pay 1,200 kyats in fines per day are exempt from the work. Many houses along both of the project routes have been demolished as a result of the construction. The people have been relocated and remain uncompensated for the loss of their homes.

According to local residents, local people from Salin Gyi, Yinma Pin, Kani, and Butalin townships will likely be conscripted for these two projects soon due to insufficient labor supply. People from these townships have already been forced to work on the Pakkoku-Gangaw railway construction project and

13 Including, Kyi Nyine, Kyauk O, Ain Kyin Taung, and Min Sar village groups.

the Ninety-nine Ponds project in Yinmar Pin township. (*Source: ABSDF*)

4.3.5.6. Monywa township

Since the beginning of 1996, local villagers from U Tha Bon Kine, Khawell Kyin, Salon, Kyun Chan, Htandaw, and Khandaw villages have been forced to labor on the construction of an underground tunnel in Monywa township. This five mile long, fifteen feet wide, and five feet deep tunnel will pass under the Chindwin River to SLORC's Northwestern Regional military command headquarters in Monywa. (*Source: ABSDF*)

4.3.5.7. Tamu township

While visiting Tamu, SLORC's Minister for Border Development, U Maung Thint, made an offhand remark which caused local LORC authorities to impose undue burdens on the local people. During his visit, Maung Thint said that the roads were not wide enough for trucks and should be widened. Later local authorities issued a public order requiring roads in Tamu township to be widened by 30 feet on each side. The order further stated that any buildings or fences which were within 30 feet of any road be demolished by owners within one week. Anyone who failed to follow the demolition orders would be prosecuted. The public capitulated with the LORC's orders for fear of reprisals, though they know the orders are unlawful and burdensome. The people had to demolish their own buildings at their own expense and did not receive any compensation for their loss.

SLORC authorities are also levying heavy taxes in Tamu township for the construction of a new city road. Every household in the township was ordered to pay 600 kyats for the first installment. The people were informed by public order that the taxes will be levied continuously until the construction is completed. (*Source: ABSDF*)

4.3.6. Magwe Division

4.3.6.1. Kan Ni reservoir project

About 25,000 local people have been forced to work on the construction of the Kan Ni reservoir project in Magwe Division since the beginning of 1996.

SLORC is undertaking a wide range of development projects in the area, including the Sittaung River Basin project, the construction of Kaung Tu reservoir, Bine Dar dam, Kawliya dam, Ye Nwe dam, and Baw Ni dam projects local people are being conscripted to work without compensation on all of these projects. Besides enduring the unpaid labor, people are required to pay taxes to SLORC for security fees, porter fees, and other arbitrary taxes and fees. (Source: ABSDF)

4.3.7. Shan State

Since November 1996, nearly 2,500 people in the Wan Hart area have been forced to work without compensation on road construction projects for SLORC troops IB 99 and LIB 525. Road construction projects include the following: Langkhur Wan Hart (18 miles long); Wan Hart Zalawng (20 miles long); Zalawng-Sop Taeng (20 miles long); Wan Hart-Mawkmai (15 miles long); and Mawkmai-Sai Khao (20 miles long). These forced labor projects along with other SLORC requirements have severely disrupted the lives of the people in Shan State. Hundreds of young people, including married couples and their families, are continually fleeing to Thailand to find work to support their families and their elders back home. Thus, in many households, only older people are available to work at the forced labor sites.

At least one person from every house in the four village tracts in the Wan Hart area must report to work each day. Any house which fails to provide a worker has to pay 200 kyats per day until a worker reports for duty. The work on these projects is grueling; people must clear the ground by digging out stones and rocks, some too big for two men to lift; carry or roll them to indicated places near the roads; and split them along the roadside. Each household must make three to four piles of gravel, six feet wide and one foot high each day. Houses with fewer people have to work until they finish at least three piles, while houses with more people have to finish four. Each household must provide their own food and tools at the work sites. For a short time, soldiers provided every ten people with 400 kyats to purchase a three-pound hammer and axes. Now, they no longer provide money or tools for the laborers. Many people live too far from the work site to walk each day. People in Kun Kharn village must sleep near the site under makeshift huts because their village is about 8 miles from the site.

Today, people in the Wan Hart area are working on an eight-mile piece of the road. When the eight miles of road is completed, they will have to continue west towards Mawkmai. In other parts of town people have worked on the

south portion of the road from Larugkbur to Wan Hart; they have completed about half of the distance. People from the Zalawng area are working towards Wan Hart.

According to a group of 31 Khum Oot villagers, including men, women, and children from ages 2 to 27, who arrived in the Fang area, Chiangmai Province, Thailand on March 14, 1997, the gravel is now piled up along the road-sides for the construction projects. However, it will soon be time to spread the gravel over the road. They admit that there will be few villagers left to do the work. (Source: SHUF)

4.4. Individual Incidents in 1996

- On January 1, 1996, Strategic Commander Myo Hla called a meeting in Kler Lah village in Taungoo district. He demanded forced laborers from the following villages: 150 people from Kler Lah village; 55 people from Beh Khaw Der; eleven people from Der Doh; eight people from Maw Ko Der; twenty people from Mu Kheh Der, and fifty people from Maw Pa Der village. (Source: KHRG)
- A Mon rubber planter was caught by SLORC soldiers in January 1996. He was tied up with a rope. He was forced to carry army materials such as guns and bullets for seventeen days before he was able to escape. (Source: UN Report)
- On January 11, 1996, Strategic Commander Myo Hla demanded 150 porters from villages in Taungoo district. He told them to bring their own food to Bu Sah Kee, Taungoo district. (Source: KHRG)
- On January 16, 1996, LIB 340 Battalion Commander Aung Kyaw Hla demanded one porter from each house in Taungoo district. Any family that failed to send a porter was fined 1,000 kyats. He also demanded from the villagers ten trucks for use in transporting supplies, carrying logs and planks, and carrying troops and wounded soldiers. (Source: KHRG)
- IB 59 and LIB 440 have been active in the Si Kheh Der, Tha Kwee Soe, and Bu Sah Kee areas in Taungoo district since March 1996. Soldiers are continually forcing villagers to work as porters carrying supplies and ammunition to Bu Sah Kee. (Source: KHRG)

- On February 3, Strategic Commander Myo Hla placed restrictions on the travel of villagers and movement of foodstuffs in Taungoo district. The Commander is charging 1,000 kyats for each travel permit for cars and 100 kyats for each person. He is forcing every household to send one person, on a rotating basis, to clear roads and work as porters. A family is fined 2,500 kyats if they cannot send a worker. (*Source: KHRG*)
- On February 12, 1997, SLORC's LIB 546 forced the villagers in Pa-an township, Thaton district, to fence the road from Myaing K'Lay to K'Ma Maung villages. Adults, as well as children from age twelve, were forced to work on the road every day. The people had to provide their own food. (*Source: KIC*)
- On February 13, 1996, IB 59 gathered as many elderly men, women, and children as they could from Kaw Thay Der village. The soldiers forced the villagers to lead them back to the army camp, rushing them to get them there before dark. The townspeople were sent ahead of the troops to act as human minesweepers and bullet shields. (*Source: KHRG*)
- On February 18, 1996, Brigadier General Kyi Aung of Southern Command ordered his troops in Column 2 of IB 59 to gather elderly men, women, and children. The troops forced the villagers to clear mines from the roads between Naw Soh and Si Kheh Der villages in Taungoo district. (*Source: KHRG*)
- On February 18, 1996, while on patrol searching for KNLA camps, SLORC troops forced a villager from Tah Paw village in Nyaunglaybin district to act as a guide. The villager stepped on a KNLA landmine and both of his legs were blown off. (*Source: KHRG*)
- On March 4, 1996, SLORC strategic commander Myo Hla from IB 59 arrived at Bagali and Kaw the De village tracts and arrested 200 villagers. The villagers were forced to work on road construction, landmine sweeping, and portering military materials to Naw Soe, Se Ghee Dee, and Palaw Mu De villages. (*Source: ABSDF*)
- On March 13, 1996, SLORC troops gathered all the women, children, and elderly people in Kaw Thay Der village, Taungoo district. The troops ordered the villagers to carry rations for the army and clear

landmines along the way between Kaw Thay Der and Naw Soe villages. (*Source: KHRG*)

- On March 25, 1996 Strategic Commander Colonel Aung Naing Htun of #3 Strategic Command, stationed in Kler Lah, Taungoo district, ordered Ber Kaw Der villagers to send “pork fees” of 4,000 kyats per household. Kler Lah and other villages in the area were also ordered to pay similar “pork fees.” (*Source: KHRG*)
- U Win Maung from Henzada, Irrawaddy division was ordered to contribute labor to build an embankment. Since he was too old, he sent 15-year-old son as his substitute; the SLORC authorities refused to accept his son. U Win Maung was then taken to the police station, where he was severely beaten. He was hospitalized from March 17 until March 24, 1996. In early April, he lodged a complaint against the Sub-Inspector of Police, but no action was taken. (*Source: UN Report*)
- In March 1996, villagers were forced to go to the village of Tu Kaw Koh to cut trees and carry timber to the saw mill in Kyet Paung village. Some villagers also had to work at the sawmill. The planks were then taken to a battalion headquarters, each village having to provide a certain number of carts with bullocks. Villagers also had to collect wood for the army brick factory, part of which was then sold back to the villagers by the soldiers. (*Source: UN Report*)
- Civilians from A-Pyoke township, Irrawaddy Division were ordered to work forced labor in the construction of sluice gate in Thadu Chaung district between April to June 1996. People were ordered to finish 50,000 pitches. One pitch was 10 ft long, 10 ft wide and one foot high. Many were sick due to the hard weather both in summer and rainy season. They were also reportedly treated badly by the authorities. (*Source: NLD*)
- The people from Hlung Mang village were ordered by U Pe Ku, head of Lailenpi police station, to construct the police station in Lailenpi, 35 miles from Hlung Mang village, between April 5, 1996 and May 4, 1996. The people were required to complete a 40 x 20 feet area within five days. The authorities did not provide food, money, or shelter for the people. (*Source: CHRO*)
- On May 21, 1996, Strategic Commander Colonel Aung Naing Htun

called a meeting at his base in Kler Lah in Taungoo district. He gave orders requiring that every village along the road perform labor without compensation building and repairing the road. The villagers were required to work on a thirteen mile stretch of road from Kler Lah. (Source: *KHRG*)

- On May 21, 1996, a column of 100 troops from IB 234, led by Major Nyi Nyi, took 20 porters from Tha Pyay Nyunt village and set out towards K'Mu Loh, Taungoo district for seven days. (Source: *KHRG*)
- The people of Ahphyauk village, Irrawaddy division, have been forced to work on a twenty-five mile irrigation canal. Those who refused to work were fined 1,300 kyats or, if they could not pay, were prosecuted under section 12 of the Village Act and sentenced to one month in prison from July to August 1996. (Source: *UN Report*)
- On October 27, 1996, two SLORC columns attacked Karen villages north and west of Kyaikdon, well into the KNU-held area. A column of 300 troops from IB 32 came from Kya In Seik Gyi and attacked the undefended village of Kwih Kaneh Khoh. The troops entered the village and looted every house. They took several men as porters to carry their loot back to Kya In Seik Gyi, where the men were released. On the same day, a different column from IB 31 attacked Yaw Doh village just north of Kyaikdon. The troops tried to enter and loot the village but encountered KNU troops. Both sides suffered casualties, so the SLORC force withdrew after looting only the northernmost part of the village, arresting seven villagers as porters (including the village headman), and arresting two other young men whom they tied up and led away with ropes. (Source: *KHRG*)
- In early 1997, the chairmen of Teddim and Tunzan townships ordered the villagers who could not contribute forced labor to pay 1200 kyats each to TLORC through the village LORC. The order came just as villagers needed to prepare their hillside fields for cultivation; failure to prepare the land meant that they would have no food for the entire year. As a result, many villagers had to sell their paddies and some of their belongings to pay the fines to the village LORC. (Source: *ABSDF/WB*).
- During the first week of March 1997, the villagers from Min Tha village, Tamu township, Sagaing division were required to dig out teak

trees from the jungle for BN 228 troops, led by Captain Tun Swe. Many of the forced laborers were beaten by soldiers. One villager were severely beaten until his leg was broken, but as usual, the army would not provide him with medical care. The villager's relatives brought him to Tamu Government Hospital but his admission was denied. The family was forced to go to Kalay Myo for medical treatment. Although they know the individuals responsible for the beating, they are afraid to bring a case against the army personnel. (*Source: FTUB/WB*)

(See also under "Personal Accounts," interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27-46, 51, 52, 53, 55, 56, 67, 69, 74, 76, 80, 81, 85, 88, and 89)

Photo (C)

**Forced laborers on Ye Tavoy Railway construction site in Mon State
(Photo By HRFOM)**

Photo (D)

Photo (14)

Villagers have to bring their own food to the worksite and are not compensated for their work. (Photo by MIS)

The villagers are on their way to do a shift of forced labor at a road construction site in Karen State where they have to work for five days. (Photo by KHRG)

Photo (15)

Photo (16)

Civilians are working on the Kalay-Gangaw railway construction project in Sagaing Division. (Photo by Tarzan Htun)

Civilians are under watch at the forced labor worksite in Mon State.
(Photo by MIS)

Photo (12)

Photo (10)

Prison labor - construction of a road along Mandalay palace wall in preparation for "Visit Myanmar Year," Mandalay, 1996.
(Photo by N. Dunlop)

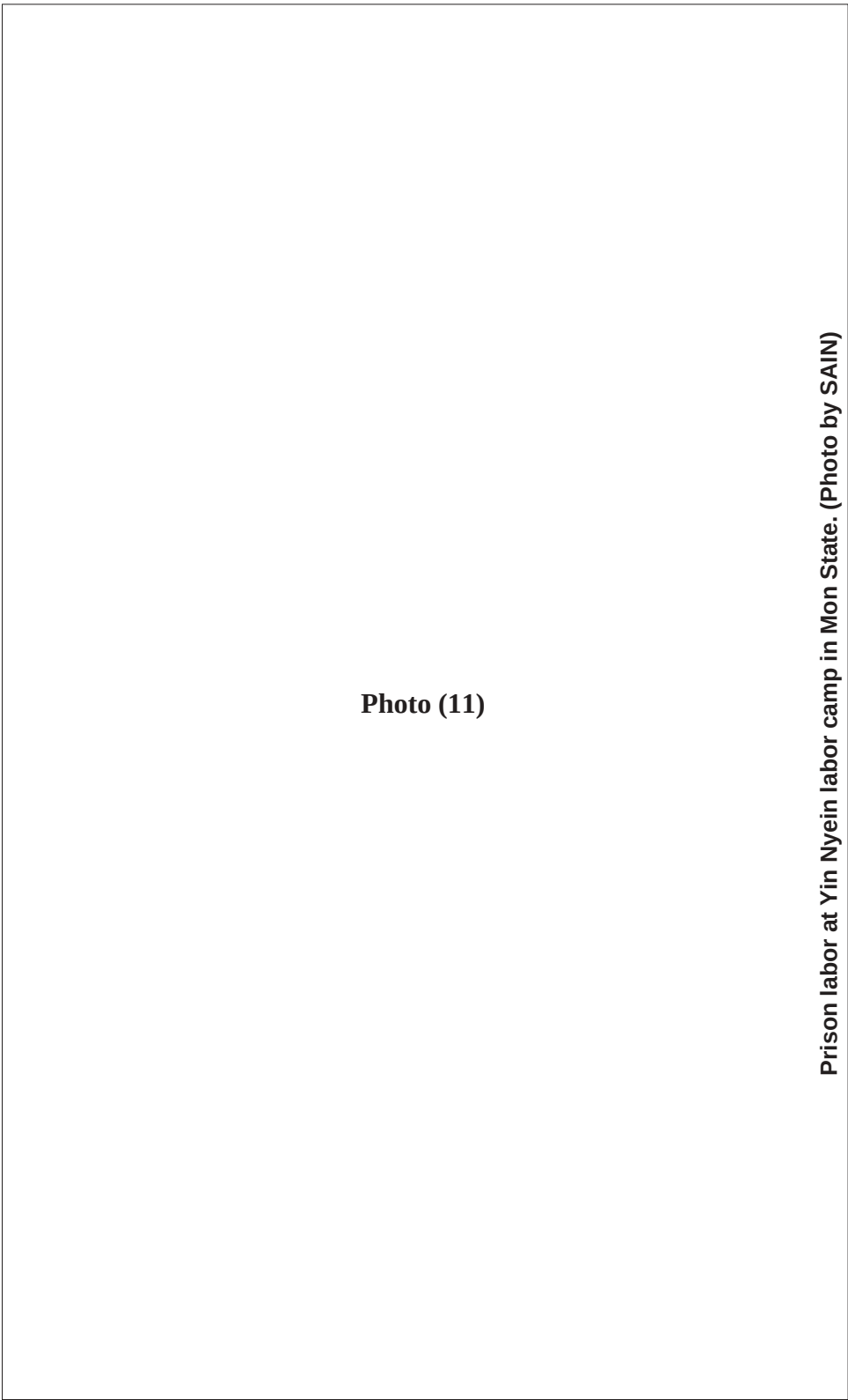


Photo (11)

Prison labor at Yin Nyein labor camp in Mon State. (Photo by SAIN)

Photo (18)

A 14-year-old escaped porter from Ye Phyu in Tenasserim Division. He was rounded up and sent to the front line to carry rice and mortar shells for SLORC's IB 104. (Photo by Burma Initiative)

Two escaped porters, both former prisoners from Rangoon prison. They say they were both beaten often by the soldiers until they escaped on March 5, 1996, in Karen State. (Photo by Burma Initiative)

Photo (19)