

5. Forced Relocation and Internally Displaced Persons

5.1 Background

The policy of the SPDC, and before it the SLORC, confronted with any form of armed resistance, has amounted to “draining the ocean so the fish cannot swim”; in other words, to undermine the opposition and attack the civilian population until it can no longer support any opposition. This is the fundamental idea behind the “Four Cuts” policy (cutting supplies of food, funds, recruits and intelligence to the resistance) which General Ne Win initiated in the 1970s. Many villages now being burned by SPDC troops were first burned in 1975 when the Four Cuts policy was first implemented, and some villagers speak of having been on the run from Burmese troops since 1975. But even these villagers say that in the past two to three years things have grown much worse. The direct attacks on the civilian population, characterized by mass forced relocations, the destruction of villages and the village economies, and completely unsustainable levels of forced labor, have now become the central pillar of SPDC policy in non-Burman rural areas of Burma. Where, in the past, two or three villages were destroyed at a time, now 100 villages are destroyed at a time.

Relocation sites are usually found in the plains under military control or near military encampments in hilly areas. Villagers who did not comply with orders or fled and were caught risked being treated as insurgents and were at times shot on sight. While the SPDC units continued to target and seek to isolate armed groups they would periodically return to earlier displaced population sites to confiscate food, destroy crops and paddy, burn and destroy settlements, so as to impose a continuously intensifying “Four-Cuts” strategy. This calculated strategy continued as long as an area harbored ethnic armed groups and was imposed for as long as it took to clear an area of armed groups and protect it from reverting back to those armed groups. This often meant forcibly moving of large portions of the local population and rendering the land sterile.

The current SPDC plan for consolidating control over areas where there is resistance appears to consist of the following steps: (a) mounting a military offensive against the area; (b) forcibly relocating all villages to sites under direct army control and destroying the original villages; (c) using the relocated villagers and others as forced laborers for portering and building military access roads into their home areas; (d) moving in more army units and using the villagers for forced labor to build bases along the access roads; (e) allowing the villagers back to their villages, where they are under complete military control and can be used as a rotating source of extortion money and forced labor, further consolidating control through “development” projects like forced labor farming for the army, etc. If resistance attacks still persist at this last stage, retaliation is carried out against villages by executing village elders, burning houses and other means.

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The most serious case of forced relocation and village destruction currently occurring is in central Shan State, where over 1,400 villages have been relocated and destroyed by the SLORC and the SPDC since 1996. An estimated 300,000 people have been made homeless, and at least 80,000 of these have fled to Thailand.

This campaign against civilians is supposedly to undermine the Shan United Revolutionary Army (SURA), a group which used to be part of Khun Sa's Mong Tai Army (MTA) until Khun Sa surrendered to the SPDC in 1996. The SURA has recently united with two other groups, the Shan State Army (SSA) and the Shan State Nationalities Army (SSNA), which signed cease-fire deals with SLORC. The new combined force named itself the Shan State Army (SSA) and has been trying to negotiate with the SPDC, but the junta refuses to recognize it and vows that it will crush it militarily. The SPDC campaign to undermine the SURA and the SSA by destroying civilian villages has been a complete failure, but the junta's response to this failure has simply been to keep expanding the region where its troops are ordered to relocate and destroy every village.

By the end of 1996, the estimated number of villages destroyed was at least 605 in eight townships in Shan State. The numbers rapidly increased, and by the end of March 1998 Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) had compiled a list of 1,478 villages in 11 townships which had been relocated and destroyed: the initial townships of Kun Hing (185 villages), Nam Zang (181), Lai Kha (201), Kay See (364), Murng Kerng (186), Murng Nai (99), and Lang Kher (31), and townships where relocations started in 1997 and 1998, including Murng Pan (61 villages), Murng Peng (24), Loi Lem (129), and Ho Pong (17). In Murng Hsu township, relocations occurred in 1996 but then were discontinued because SURA troops were not operating there.

Some villages have been issued written orders to move, but in most cases the order is just given orally by the local military officer or a passing patrol. Sometimes village leaders of several villages in an area are summoned to meetings and given orders to relocate. The order generally allows them three to seven days, sometimes longer, to get out of their village, after which they are told that all belongings will be destroyed and all villagers shot on sight. The officers give reasons for the relocation, usually accusing the villagers of harboring Shan soldiers or telling them that the civilians must be cleared out so the Shan soldiers can be killed, though in many cases these villages have had little or no contact with Shan soldiers. In the earlier relocations, many villages were ordered to move to more central "consolidation villages", and many others were simply driven out without being told where to go. More recently in 1998, most villages being relocated are being ordered to empty fields beside army camps, motor roads, or large towns such as Kun Hing and Lai Kha, rather than to other villages. Most villagers begin moving their belongings immediately, making several trips to save as much of their food supplies and possessions as possible before the deadline. Those without bullock carts or "trologies" (small motorized Chinese tractors which can haul small carts) find it very difficult to save their possessions in time, particularly if it is a full day's walk or further to the relocation site. In some cases, SPDC troops have confiscated everyone's rice supplies just before the move, then redistributed only a small part of it back to the villagers once they arrive at the relocation site.

Most villagers either move to the relocation sites as ordered or flee toward Thailand;

very few risk staying in their villages or hiding in the nearby forests, because SPDC patrols move through the areas, shooting villagers on sight and often destroying the remains of villages. In some areas military helicopters have been used to search areas the day before armed columns arrive there. Hundreds of villagers have been shot on sight, beaten or stabbed to death, suffocated with plastic bags, drowned, or burned alive in their homes upon being found in their villages or fields after relocation deadlines. The Shan Human Rights Foundation has documented the killings of 664 villagers in the relocation region by SPDC forces during 1997 alone, and this list is far from complete.

Through 1997 and 1998, the SPDC has expanded the relocation area to the east (across the Salween River into Murng Peng township), to the south into Murng Pan township, and to the west of Murng Kerng, Lai Kha and Nam Zang, into Ho Pong and Loi Lem townships. The relocation area already covers over 7,000 square miles, and new refugees arriving in Thailand report that throughout April 1998 the SPDC has been relocating more villages further and further west of Loi Lem, expanding the relocation area almost as far west as Taunggyi, the capital of Shan State. There is no sign that the relocations will abate any time soon. Furthermore, many of the people who were forced to move in 1996 and 1997 have now been forced to move again, and some villagers report that they have been moved from one relocation site to another three or four times since 1996 as the SPDC attempts to consolidate the population further. (*Source:SHRF*)

53 Life in the relocation sites in Shan State

When the relocations began in 1996, villagers were given a few days to move to army-controlled sites near army camps and along supply roads. However, many villagers were simply driven out of their villages and not even told where to go. When this campaign had clearly failed to undermine the Shan armies, the SPDC began ordering people at relocation sites to move yet again, to sites which were even more crowded and central. On February 21, 1997, SPDC troops even shelled Kho Lam relocation site in order to drive the villagers out. Five villagers were killed, including two children. On June 16, 1997, two different SPDC columns massacred villagers at Sai Khao and Tard Pa Ho in Kunhing township. The villagers had SPDC passes to return to their villages to fetch their rice, but these were ignored. At Sai Khao 36 villagers were tied up and machine-gunned, and at Tard Pa Ho 29 villagers were similarly executed, including women and children. The Sai Khao column was led by the region's Tactical Commander himself, and one SPDC officer told a woman whom he secretly released from the massacre that they had received specific orders by radio from higher levels to conduct the massacres.

People at the relocation sites are constantly being used by the SPDC troops as porters for carrying military supplies, forced laborers for building and maintaining army camps, guarding motor roads, clearing roadsides, and maintaining roads. Those in the Lai Kha, Nam Zang and Loi Lem areas were used as forced laborers to build the new military air base near Nam Zang which is now completed, and they have also been used to build railways: first from Shwe Nyaung to Nam Zang, which is now essentially complete and has a small train running on it, and now from Nam Zang southward to Murng Nai and from Shwe Nyaung up the hills to Taunggyi.

Tens of thousands of villagers are struggling to survive in the relocation sites,

where they are constantly used as forced laborers by SPDC troops who give them nothing and even demand part of whatever little food or money they still have. Many are starving, unable to return to their villages or fields for fear of being shot on sight. People in the relocation sites and those who have fled to the towns are now reduced to begging in the streets or along the rural motor roads.

Most young people and entire families who still have any money left are fleeing to Thailand to try to find a way to survive there. More than half the population of some areas has already fled to Thailand. An estimated 80,000-100,000 Shan, Pa-O, Palaung and Lahu refugees have fled to Thailand because of these relocations and related abuses. Currently, most families who still have any money left for the trip are attempting to flee. If they have no money then young people or middle-aged couples walk the entire distance, leaving their families behind if necessary in the hope of getting work in Thailand and returning with money to survive. Most people pay the drivers of passenger trucks to get them to the border, and the entire trip takes three or four stages. Fares are exorbitant, because the drivers have to pay off the soldiers at every SPDC checkpoint along the road. It is common for each passenger to have to pay 5,000 *kyat* or more for a trip of less than 100 km. The passengers must also be able to pay off SPDC soldiers at every checkpoint along the way. As long as they can pay, the SPDC generally lets them pass. However, beginning in late 1997 or early 1998, SPDC troops at the last checkpoints before Thailand have begun confiscating the National Identity Cards of all Shans heading for Thailand. The cardholders are given a receipt and told that they will be able to collect their cards when they return to Burma. A similar method has been used since 1992 to strip Muslim Rohingya refugees of their identification when they flee from Arakan State to Bangladesh. If the refugees later try to go home, the SPDC often denies that they ever lived in Burma.

On arrival in Thailand, the Shan refugees must evade capture and forced repatriation by the Thai authorities. In Thailand they are not recognized as refugees and have no choice but to enter the dangerous market for illegal labor. Many are exploited by their Thai employers, while others end up as bonded laborers in sweatshops or in the sex trade. In March 1998, after SPDC troops had attempted to attack a group of Shan refugees in northwestern Thailand, the Thai authorities for the first time allowed a group of over 200 Shan refugees to move into an existing Karenni refugee camp. However, they still have no recognition as refugees, only as people who “fled fighting” when a battle happened to occur near the MTA’s former headquarters at Ho Murng; so it can be expected, in keeping with the current Thai policy of denying asylum to new refugees, that the Thai Army will attempt to force these people back to Burma once the situation “returns to normal” around Ho Murng and the SPDC indicates its willingness to “accept them back.” (*Source: SHRF*)

54. Relocation in Karenni State

Between April and July 1996, the SLORC issued orders to at least 182 villages in Karenni (Kayah) State to relocate to military-controlled sites within five to seven days. The primary intention was to bring the civilians under tighter military control and cut off any possibility of civilian support for the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP). The other resistance groups in Karenni, the Karenni Nationalities People’s Liberation Front (KNPLF), the Kayan New Land Party (KNLP), and the Shan Nationalities People’s

Liberation Organization (SNPLO), have already made cease-fire deals with the SLORC. However, the KNPP is a significantly larger and older resistance force than the others. The KNPP made a cease-fire deal with the SPDC in March 1995, but the SLORC simply used the cease-fire as a cover to move its troops into offensive positions and then broke the cease-fire by launching an offensive against the KNPP in June 1996. The bulk of the forced relocations were implemented at the same time. Fighting has been ongoing ever since, despite the false SLORC/SPDC claim that the KNPP surrendered in 1996 and that there has been no fighting in Karenni since then. Currently the bulk of the fighting is in the southern part of the state, in both the southeast and the southwest.

The villages affected by the forced relocations cover more than half the geographic area of the state and are home to at least 20,000-30,000 people. They were given no more than a week to move to the army-specified sites, and the written orders issued to their villages stated that after that week they would be considered as enemy troops and shot on sight if seen in their villages by SLORC/SPDC patrols. After receiving the relocation orders many people fled into the forest, while others went to the specified relocation sites, unable to take anything more than their children and whatever load they could carry on their backs for the often long walk through the hills. Some of the sick and elderly had no choice but to remain behind in their villages because they were not physically capable either of fleeing or of undertaking the long walk to the relocation sites. However, the SPDC was true to its word, and shortly thereafter patrols started sweeping the villages area by area, taking anything of value that was left and then burning all signs of habitation. Villagers caught in these areas were either forced to relocation sites or shot on sight.

Since the beginning of 1998, there are reports that the SPDC has now begun relocating and destroying villages in northern Karenni along the Shan State border. This had been one of the few areas where villagers could still live because it was protected by the Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF), which had a cease-fire deal with SPDC. The area also provided refuge to some villagers fleeing the relocations in other parts of the state. However, under the SPDC these cease-fire deals no longer appear to carry any weight when villages are to be destroyed. (*Source: KNAHR*)

55. Life in the relocation sites in Karenni State

Some people still try to remain hidden in the forest, but most gave in to the order and moved to the relocation sites, which were scattered through out the state at Shadaw, Ywathit, Mawchi, Pah Saung, Baw La Keh, and other smaller locations. As more villages were relocated, more sites were created. All were under complete control of the army, usually located adjacent to new or existing army bases.

In the relocation sites the army provided nothing at first; villagers had to find materials to build their own shelters and were reliant on whatever food they had brought along with them. Within weeks many started going hungry and getting sick from lack of food and good water. In response, the SLORC officers controlling most of the sites gave permission for villagers to return to their villages for one week, as their last chance to bring food, belongings, livestock and supplies. For most villagers one week only allowed them time for one trip on foot, so it was impossible to bring back anything that would support them for very long. However, many took the opportunity to bring back whatever they

could, while many others used it to go into hiding in the forest or to attempt to escape to the Karenni refugee camps already existing in Thailand. They had seen what life held for them in the relocation sites, and they were determined not to go back.

In the relocation sites the situation started off badly and has only deteriorated over time. In the beginning the troops at many of the sites forced the villagers to hand over whatever rice they had brought, then rationed it out to everyone. This rice only lasted a short time, then most of the villagers received nothing. When more began to starve, the troops began issuing rations consisting of rice and sometimes salt. At first each person received one *pyi* [about 2 kg] of rice each three days, but this was soon cut back to one *pyi* per week, less than half what a person needs to survive. Currently, villagers in the relocation sites only receive this, or even less. Aid organizations and the Catholic Church (many Karenni villagers are Catholic) have attempted to provide food and other aid for the people in the relocation sites, but the SPDC will not allow them into the sites and usually insists that any aid must be given to the army, which can then distribute it; generally when this is done in Burma the army simply keeps the aid. It is not clear where the rice currently being issued to the villagers is coming from; it may be from the Church, or it may be from the rice which the SPDC is now forcing all farmers in Karenni to hand over for nothing. Farmers in areas which have not been forced to relocate now have to hand over at least one third of their crop to the army, while others have been ordered to grow a second crop in the dry season (which requires irrigation, is harmful to the land and threatens the main wet season crop because it prolongs the life of insects and parasites). All of this dry season crop has to be given to the army. It is almost certain that the SPDC is either being given or stealing the rice from somewhere, because it goes against its normal practice ever to give anything to villagers in relocation sites.

Villagers at some sites try to find paid labor just outside the camps, but the surrounding villages have already been made destitute by SPDC looting, extortion and crop confiscation, so there is very little paid work to be found. Even though the villagers have little or no food to eat, the SPDC in most relocation sites refuses to allow them to cultivate any land. One exception is Nwa La Bo relocation site north of Loikaw, where permission was given for villagers to farm outside the camp; however, they had to pay 50 *kyats* each time they wanted to leave the camp, and permission is often suspended for various reasons, so many of the crops have failed from neglect. In Nwa La Bo the army forces villagers to go and work in a nearby army vegetable plantation several times a month; the soldiers tell them the vegetables are for the people in the relocation site, but the people there never see them.

Most of the relocation sites have insufficient water for the people living there, and people often have to walk long distances to get water, or also use unclean water. Disease is a very serious problem in the relocation sites; the KNPP believes that at least 300 people have died of treatable illnesses in the sites since 1996, and the testimony of villagers who have lived in the sites appears to bear this out. Villagers who have escaped from the sites regularly state that every member of their family was sick, that at least one person in each family was sick, or that they knew of several people dying of disease every month. The major killers appear to be malaria, diarrhoea, and dysentery, though respiratory ailments, skin diseases, and almost every infection and parasite which exists in the region are also widespread. There are medical clinics in some of the relocation sites and pharmacies in

some of the adjacent villages, but the clinics will only treat villagers if they can pay a cash bribe on top of having to buy their own medicines from the pharmacies, and the medicines are extremely expensive. Most villagers in the relocation sites have no money to pay either the bribe or the price of the medicines, and many have died as a direct result of this.

Some of the relocation sites have basic schools and Buddhist monasteries, but there appears to be a policy of forbidding the construction of Christian churches. Villagers have repeatedly been denied permission to build churches in the sites, even though a large proportion of the Karenni population is Christian, primarily Roman Catholics followed by Baptists. When the forced relocations first occurred, some of the Catholic priests and lay preachers from the villages were told to go to Loikaw and stay among the church representatives there rather than go to the relocation sites with the other villagers.

Even though the villagers are going hungry and struggling to survive, SPDC troops controlling the camps still make them perform forced labor on a daily or weekly basis. The villagers are forced to build and maintain army camps in the area, to build fences, dig bunkers, cultivate land for the army, cut firewood, haul water to hilltop army camps and, do other general servant's work, haul army rations to the hilltops when they are delivered, and sometimes to go as porters with SPDC patrols, although currently the troops take many of their porters from among the prisoners in Loikaw jail. The villagers are not given any money or any extra food for this labor. Relocated villagers are also being used as forced laborers to build at least two roads: the 96-mile road from Mawchee westward across Karen State to Taungoo, and a short road near Loikaw from the base of IB 269 to the village of Ye Yaw. Families in Mawchee relocation site and in the town itself have to send one person each day to work on the Mawchee-Taungoo road; families are each given an assignment and must stay at the road, eating their own food until it is finished. This road is supposed to facilitate the transport of minerals from the Mawchee mine into central Burma. However, the road was already rebuilt once in the 1970s, and then it only lasted two months before it was destroyed by the rains. The same is likely to happen again.

At most of the relocation sites the troops no longer guard the perimeter very tightly because the villagers have no choice but to scavenge for food outside the camp. Many villagers have taken advantage of this opportunity and fled into the forests, usually to go and live in hiding back around their old villages. They join the others still there, many of whom have already been living in hiding for close to two years now. Most of the villagers in hiding are staying in the forests somewhere near their old village. Almost all of the relocated villages have now been burned and completely destroyed by SPDC patrols, but most villagers had some food supplies and belongings hidden in caves or small storage barns in the forest and have been able to live off this for some time. Those who have been in hiding for any length of time have already exhausted their supplies, and are trying to live by growing small crops in parts of their long-overgrown fields, or by finding the hidden food supplies of other villagers who have long since gone to the relocation sites or to Thailand. Those who remain have no access to medicines, and many have already died of disease.

The SPDC still sends patrols into the abandoned villages, area by area, seeking out Karenni forces or villagers in hiding. Many villagers stay together with groups of Karenni soldiers for some form of protection. The soldiers sometimes have limited supplies of medicine and some rations, both of which they share when possible with villagers who are

particularly desperate. Villagers can only stay in small groups of two or three families to minimize the chance of detection. Those who are not staying with Karenni troops stay in small shelters in the forest, often taking turns as sentries to watch for any SPDC troops coming their way. Once in a while the patrols find their shelters and they must flee to another place, and once in a while they are seen and shot by SPDC patrols. Even if they are only wounded they are likely to end up dead, because the troops will either finish them off with a knife or leave them to die in the forest because of the impossibility of getting treatment or medicines. Despite all these difficulties, more and more villagers are choosing this way of life over the slow death offered by the relocation sites.

Immediately following the biggest wave of forced relocations in June/July 1996, about 3,000 people arrived at existing Karenni refugee camps in Thailand. A few months later after the rainy season another 1,300 arrived. Since that time there has only been a slow trickle of people crossing the border into Thailand. Groups of 60 or 70 reached the refugee camps in January 1998 and then again in March. Most of these people have finally fled to Thailand because they found that there was no way they could survive any longer in the relocation sites or in hiding. They say that they did not make the trip previously for several reasons: that they were determined to stay near their land if there was any way to survive there, that many of the sick, weak and elderly were unable to make the long trip over the hills through abandoned areas of burned and destroyed villages, that there are no boats crossing the big rivers anymore, and primarily that the SPDC has sent so many troops into the area between the Salween River and the Thai border that it is almost impossible to get through without getting caught, especially if travelling with children and the elderly. Access to the Thai border is almost completely blocked for these people. (*Source: KNAHR*)

5.6 Karen State

Relocation in Dooplaya district

Dooplaya District of central Karen State, a large region which stretches from the Myawaddy-Kawkareik-Kyone Doh motor road in the north to the Three Pagodas Pass area in the south, was largely controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU) until 1995. In that year a major SLORC offensive completed SLORC's control of the Thai border from Myawaddy southward to Wah Lay and captured the northern part of the "hump", a mountainous portion of Dooplaya which projects eastward into Thailand. In a much larger offensive in February-March 1997, the SPDC succeeded in capturing almost all of the remainder of Dooplaya district. Over 10,000 new refugees fled to Thailand and are now interned in Noh Po refugee camp, but most villagers remained inside the district, either trapped by the speed of the SPDC advance or hoping to survive under the SPDC occupation. Many of these villagers have subsequently fled or tried to flee to Thailand due to forced labor and other abuses by the occupying troops.

After occupying areas such as Dooplaya, normal SPDC practice is forcibly to relocate all small or remote villages to garrison villages where they are under direct military control, then to use the villagers as forced laborers building and servicing new military camps in the area and to build military access roads into the area. This has been the case

during the one-year occupation of Dooplaya, though it has been enacted in various ways and to varying extents in different parts of the region.

In January 1998, many Karen villages in the far south of Dooplaya were forced by SPDC IB. 230 to relocate to Thanbyuzayet and Three Pagodas Pass. Meh K'Naw, Meh K'Wa, Htee Kay, Htee Kilh Thu, Lay May, Htee Po Yu, Ah Pa Lone, Lay Po, Hsing Pyay, Kwih Prer Htee, Maw Po and other villages were given three days to move, after which several houses in each village were burned and Meh K Naw and Htee Maw Keh villages were burned completely. Suffering from a lack of food at the relocation site, the villagers finally managed to get permission to return to their villages, but they have to pay extortion money regularly to IB 230 and go on rotating shifts of three days portering labor. Anyone who cannot go must pay 1,000 *kyat*.

In the latter part of 1997 several other villages in southern Dooplaya were forced to move to Taung Zone (aka. Lay Noh) and Anand Gwin (aka. Noh Chut Neh) along the road from Thanbyuzayut to the Three Pagodas Pass, and Knerh Kamaw and Gkar near the Ye-Thabyuzayut motor road.

Several villages in the Kya-ein-seik-kyi area of western Dooplaya, such as T'Ka Kee, Toh Kee and Kalay Kee, have been forced to move and the villagers have been scattered. In central Dooplaya, many pockets of remote villages were forced to move, such as K'Lan Lay, Dta Ri and Htee Po Ghaw, which were forced to Dta Nay Pya.

The general practice has been to force small and remote villages to move to larger villages which are more directly under the control of SPDC troops. In many villages, particularly in central Dooplaya, orders were issued for all villagers living in houses or farm field huts outside the villages to move into the center of their villages. In southern and western Dooplaya some of the relocations have not been rescinded, but many of the villagers in Dooplaya who were forced to relocate were later allowed to go back to their villages after complaining that they could not farm or earn their living. Even so, villagers who live in remote areas or out in their fields always run by high risk of being caught for porters or shot by patrolling SPDC troops. Relocations continue to be ordered sporadically whenever and wherever the KNLA activities flare up. In areas of southern and western Dooplaya where villagers cannot get permission to return to their home villages, they have no choice but to try to find a living at relocation villages or in the villages of their relatives. This is extremely difficult, because these places tend to be quite strongly SPDC-controlled, often even having an SPDC base right at the village, so the relocated villagers are used all the time for forced labor and have trouble paying all the extortion fees levied on them.

At least 700 families remain internally displaced in central Dooplaya, not daring to go back to their villages but afraid to escape to Thailand. Most of them are villagers who could no longer bear the burden of rotating forced labor but had no money to pay to avoid it, while some are villagers who fled the initial SPDC offensive and went into the forest, are afraid that if they return to their villages now they will be arrested and suspected of contact with the KNLA. Some of these families had already fled to Thailand once but were forced back by the Thai authorities; some of them were among the group which was shot by Thai troops at Thay Pu Law Htwee in November 1997. There are also scattered families of internally displaced villagers in the south of Dooplaya near the Three Pagodas Pass-Thabyuzayut road, who fled the forced relocations of villages in the area in late 1997 and early 1998 and are now living in hills. Several thousand people from southern Dooplaya

have fled southward to Mon-held areas since the occupation in early 1997, and some people continue to flee in that direction. The SPDC regularly issues orders for these people to return to their villages, but they dare not for fear of arrest. They stay in small groups of shelters in the forest, fleeing from one shelter to another every month or every two months when a SPDC patrol comes near their shelters. Each family has four or five shelters and two or three rice fields, scattered in different places so that they can keep ahead of SPDC patrols. Because they always have to move, they have difficulty growing or obtaining enough food, and they have no access whatsoever to medicines. Many of these people have already died of disease, particularly children and the elderly. (*Source: KHRG*)

Pa-an District

Forced relocation is increasingly becoming the cornerstone of SPDC military practice throughout Burma, and in mid-1998 the military appeared to become much more serious about forcibly relocating villages in southeastern Pa-an district, Karen State, as well as those further north in the Dawna Range. In the southeast, the DKBA called all village headmen in the area to a meeting in Ker Ghaw in the middle of the rainy season, at which they announced an SPDC order that all villages will be forced to move to Kwih Lay, Sgaw Ko or Ker Gkaw as soon as rice harvest is finished at the end of 1998. Villages which will be forced to move include Taw Oak, Meh Pleh Toh, Toh Thu Kee and other villages not directly controlled by the SPDC; the complete list is unclear, because some villagers believe that Sgaw Ko and Kwih Lay will be forced to move, while others believe that these villages will be used as relocation sites. At the meeting the DKBA stated that anyone who remains in the relocated villages “will be in our gun sights.” The reason they have given such early notification may have been to encourage the villagers to start moving out now and this is having its desired effect. Many villagers have already fled Taw Oak, Sgaw Ko and other villages in the area while they can still choose where to go, rather than wait for SPDC soldiers to drive them out at gunpoint.

Further north in the eastern Dawna the SPDC has taken a much more direct approach to forcing the villagers to move. In August they launched a military operation named “Aung Moe Hein” using troops from LI Division 44. The intent appears to be to drive the entire civilian population out of the area with little care for where they go. Villagers already began fleeing the area in late August 1998; 1,500 villagers fled across the border into Thailand and others fled higher into the hills of the Dawna Range. Then in September, the LI Division 44 troops formed three columns of approximately 100 soldiers each and destroyed several villages, causing another 1,600 or more villagers to flee to Thailand from Po Ti Pwa, Ma Oh Pu, Tha Pwith Hser, Tee K’Haw, Wah Mi Klah, B’Nweh Pu, Po Paw Lay, Meh Lah Ah Hta, Meh Lah Ah Kee, Meh Keh, and Klay Poo Kloh. Refugees from most of these villages say they never received any relocation order, villages were simply attacked without warning. In Wah Mi Klah village, the villagers did not flee, but the SPDC troops still burned at least one house, killed the livestock and took villagers to be porters. As result, all the remaining villagers in these and other villages in the area fled higher into the hills, and over 3,000 villagers fled across the border into Thailand. The assault troops have now based themselves in the area, so none of the villagers dare return and have had to abandon their crops and most of their possessions. (*Source: KHRG*)

Taungoo District

All of the villages in the hills away from the vehicle roads and army camps in Taungoo district, Karen State, are considered by the SPDC to be part of the “black” area. The SPDC has not yet been able to extend its control effectively into the hills so it would like to see the entire area depopulated, and to accomplish this the troops have been ordering villages to move, capturing or killing villagers they find in the hills while on patrol, destroying crops and food supplies and sometimes burning houses.

The villages of Hsaw Wah Der, Bu Sah Kee, Wah Tho Ko, Der Doh, Maw Ko Der, Bpeh Gkaw Der, Ko Pler Der, Ko Kler Der, Kler Kaw Day, Kaw Soh Ko and Klay Soe Kee have all been ordered to move to Baw Gali village. This list is far from complete, and in fact every village in the hills of Taungoo district which is not adjacent to a road or a military camp has been ordered to relocate in 1998. Some, such as Hsaw Wah Der and Bu Sah Kee, have been repeatedly ordered to move over the past three years, while most of the others received orders to move throughout 1998. The number of forced relocation orders appears to have increased since the completion of the road from Baw Gali Gyi to Bu Sah Kee in 1997. Following orders to move, villagers say that troops burned houses and field huts in several villages, including Bu Sahn Kee, Hsaw Wah Der, Sho Hta, Paw Baw Soe, Si Kheh Der, Plaw My Der, Ghaw Kee, Tha Aye Kee, Maw Ko Der, Blah Kee, Pwih Kee, Oo Per, Htee Hsah Bper, Ko Go Der and Sho Ko. In most cases only some of the houses in the villages were burned, but afterwards each passing patrol burns down more houses and farm field huts, particularly wherever they see evidence of continued habitation.

Most of the orders to relocate were delivered directly by patrols passing through the villages, telling the villagers that they had to get out within seven to fifteen days and afterwards would be shot if seen in the area. Villagers who have moved as ordered say that on arrival in Baw Gali Gyi, a large village of 300-400 households, they were told to build bamboo huts outside the village but were given no assistance whatsoever by the authorities. Some people from nearby villages helped them, but for the most part they had to cut and haul the bamboo themselves. No bamboo was available locally because the large population of Baw Gali Gyi had used all of it, so this required going long distances to obtain bamboo and leaves for roofing. The relocated villagers had to survive on whatever food they had with them and most could find no way to growing food or earning a livelihood, so many of them left and returned to the area of their villages to hide in the forests. (*Source: KHRG*)

57. Tenasserim Division

Moe Htaung area development project

Villages along the road between Tavoy and Moe Htaung border town in Tenasserim Division were ordered to move by the SPDC battalions under the command of No. 13 Operation Control Headquarters in November, 1998. With the claims of Moe Htaung border area development project, two model concentration villages were set up by the military in the region. Villages nearby were ordered to relocate to Kyein Chaung Hle Seik model village and Kyein Chaung Hle Pyu model village. Both model villages are under the

direct control of LIB 558 under the No. 13 Operation Control Headquarters. Villagers in the newly-established model villages are being ordered to work on road construction and cultivation projects run by the military. Due to the economic hardship and high demand of forced labor in these two model villages, 130 villagers of the 21 households from Kyein Chaung Hle Seik model village escaped on November 3 to Thai-Burma border. They arrived at the border on November 11. After finding out about the escape of the villagers from the model village, soldiers from LIB 558 issued an order saying that no villagers would be allowed to go out without permission. Anyone would be shot dead if found outside the village. People in the two model villages are starving and unable to earn money in the camps. (*Source: HRDU*)

Tavoy township

Villagers who lived on the eastern bank of Gamone Thwe creek in Myee Khan Baw village tract, Tavoy township, Tenasserim Division, were ordered to relocate to the western bank of creek. Commander of IB 25 based in Tavoy summoned the village headmen from eight villages in Myee Khan Baw village track on December 21, 1998 and ordered them to relocate. The name of the villages were See Pyone, Myee Khan Baw, Kami, Nyaungdon, Hnin Payoke, Kyetha Inn, Thabyu Chaung and Pyinthataw. This relocation order was caused by recent fighting between the SPDC and KNU on December 17, 1998. Nine SPDC soldiers were killed and 19 were wounded in the fighting.

In May 1998, Kyauk Htone, Thabyu Chaung, Maw Lekay and Myintmo Letkhet villages in Tavoy township, Tenasserim Division, were forcibly ordered to relocate to Phaungdaw village by the SPDC LIB 4 and IN 75, under the command of Division.66. In order to exert pressure to the villagers to relocate, SPDC troops have cut all food supplies to the villages since May 1998. Due to threats and pressure by the SPDC, some have relocated to the new site, but about 1,500 people have fled to Thai-Burma border. They arrived at the border on May 20, 1998. (*Source: HRDU*)

Palaw township

In Tenssarim Division, relocation programs began on the western coast in Palaw township in particular, starting during the 1997 rainy season and resumed in the 1998 dry season. Palaw is among five townships in Mergui district. The area is divided into two parts by an upper and lower car road. All the villages situated in the upper car road near the mountains are Karen villages. The KNLA used to be active in this area. The lower car road is close to the coast where there are Burmese and some Karen villages. This area is mainly controlled by the Burma army. Before 1997, this area was under the KNLA control.

Karen villagers have faced mass relocations since 1997. After the SPDC took control of the Tenasserim River region in 1997, the KNLA movement was still active in Palaw township. This caused problems for the SPDC as their military transportation was constantly disrupted by the KNLA. To suppress the KNLA movement, the SPDC started relocating the Karen villages situated along the upper car road close to this transportation route. Some villagers went to the relocation sites. Many fled and are hiding behind their villages or at

the heads of mountain streams. Villages situated along the lower car road were forced to consolidate and were either relocated beside the road, to villages that the SPDC fully controlled, or to designated relocation sites.

The Karen villages situated along the upper car road were all relocated. The whole upper car road region has been made a free-fire zone. Most of the villagers did not go to the SPDC designated relocation site but moved deeper into the jungle to avoid ongoing persecution by the the SPDC. They tried to avoid forced labor, the extortion of money, portering duties and fees, work at military camps and other abuses. Villagers near the lower road could not easily flee to the jungle because they were deep in an SPDC controlled area and far from the jungle.

At the relocation sites, villagers are not let out without SPDC authorities or Burmese army permission. If they want to leave the compound they have to get a pass, which gives permission to leave from the morning till the evening only. Most of the villagers that lived along the lower car road, or those relocated are able to go to their fields and gardens in the morning and return in the evening.

Villagers relocated to another village, road or designated site further from their original village face worse conditions. They cannot return to tend their fields and gardens, and they were not allowed to bring their rice or paddy when relocated. They have no livelihood or income. A few leave looking for work at nearby Burmese villages, but most cannot. At the relocation site they have to buy rice and other food, firewood and water. The worst known is Palawgone relocation site, located in a field, far from the original villages. It is hot and the inmates have to buy water.

At the relocation sites, the military can easily demand forced labor and porters. Villagers have been ordered to build military camps, dig foxholes, make traps, fences and clear bushes around the camps.

At relocation sites the troops demands various fees from the villagers. The main types of fees demanded include portering fees, fee to cover the expenses of soldiers, the cost of building schools, and compensation if attacked by the KNLA. On February 17, 1998, the KNLA attacked a group of SPDC soldiers and *Pyithusit* (militia) at Gaing Kyi village in Palaw township. Two SPDC soldiers died and five were wounded. On February 26, 1998, money was demanded from villagers at the Palawgone relocation site, where everyone is Karen, for medicine to treat the injured soldiers and militia. Each house had to pay 500 *kyat*. They also demanded 450 *kyat* from each household in Palawgone village where all the villagers are Burmese. The villagers do not have a lot of money but they were afraid of the troops. So they either borrowed money from other villagers or sold valuable possessions. There is systematic extortion by the military.

Villagers in hiding live some distance from each other. They have built small huts to hide their paddy, food supplies, and other materials. The major concern is that the SPDC army will come and find them.

Between January and March 1998, the SPDC and militia searched for villagers hiding in Mi Chaung Theit stream area four times. Other areas have been searched. Houses, barns and plantations found have been burnt down. The SPDC accused the villagers who were hiding and supplying the KNLA with food, and being a KNLA village volunteer force. Villagers seen were arrested. Sometimes villagers were shot on sight, probably when they did not stop running away. Women arrested were taken to the battalion's camp. Most

of the arrested male villagers were tortured, and later killed. The Burmese army used them first as guides to show the way to other hiding Internally Displaced Persons. If any IDPs were captured or surrendered to the SPDC army, other villagers nearby immediately moved. (*Source: Burma Issue*)

5.8 List of incidents

◆ In January 1998, Karens villages in Kawkareik district, were ordered to relocate to the new designated areas. The SPDC battalions ordered Htee Panweh, Htee Gor, Htee Par Doh, Phoo Chee Khee, Htee Wah Doh, Htee Kay, Pa Deh Padaw to Phoo Chee village, Gaza Pokee to Gaza village, Goleh, Kah Kyaw Kee, Meh Nona, Htee Lorbele and Kyauk Meh to Kyaik Rauk village. (*Source: KIC*)

◆ In January 1998, the SPDC troops ordered the villages in Wun Yay townships to relocate to the designated areas. They ordered Apalon and Tatdain villages to move to Taungzun village, Erkawaw and Meh Kawa villages to Kyauk Baloo village, Pawa Theh and Koo Pathehta villages to Beh Lamut village, Thakethem Saw Kyaw Kee Leh and Garta villages to Kanerkamot village, Wah Morlay and three other villages to Not Chu Mor village, Htee Nerkee, Wah Mee Khot and Taung Galay villages to Ma Ure village. (*Source: KIC*)

◆ In February 1998, after the battle between the SSA-east and the SPDC in Ho Murng, SPDC troops ordered the villages of Nawng Kham, Nam Kat, Nawng Aw, Kharn Mon, Nam Lin, Nawng Yao, Ho Murng, Nawng Leng, Long Zerk, Tak Let, Nar Mai Lur, Nar Mai and Khong Long in Ho Murng area, Shan State, to relocate in a central place. (*Source: SHRF*)

◆ On February 28, 1998, troops from IB 230 led by Major Maung Maung Naing ordered the Karen villages situated on either side of the Zami River in Kya-in-seik-kyi township, Karen State to relocate. The troops did not indicate the place to which to relocate, but they threatened anyone with being shot dead if they were found again in the region. (*Source: MIS*)

◆ On March 9, 1998, Ta Wah village near Loikaw, Karenni State was forced to relocate to Wa Lu Hu, where there is an SPDC base. The villagers were forced to move by LIB 337. The village had 70-100 houses. After the villagers moved, their village was burned down by SPDC troops. (*Source: KNWO*)

◆ On March 20, 1998, Pata and Beh Kee villages in Karenni State were relocated to Wa Lu Hu, this time by LIB 427. Each village had about 50 households. After the move, the villages were burned. The villages had received the order to move on March 1, telling them that they had until March 7 to move. Pata and Beh Kee villages are in Wa Lu Hu village tract, Karenni State. (*Source: KNWO*)

◆ On April 10, 1998, troops from LIB 284 drove out 15 Karen families living in Kyon Kwe village in Kawkareik township. (*Source: MIS*)

◆ On May 25, 1998, the SPDC troops ordered Noe Gaw village, Kyaukkyi township Karen State to relocate either to Kyaukkyi town or Klaw Maw Kho village within the month of June. (*Source: KIC*)

◆ On May 25, 1998, troops from LIB 355 led by Captain Saw Aung ordered the Karen villagers living at Sekkwet village in Kawkareik township, Karen State, to abandon

from the village immediately. He warned that there would be a harsh punishments for those who failed to obey the order. (*Source: MIS*)

◆ In June 1998, a military column led by Major Aung Khaing from LIB 231 and Captain Zaw Min Nyunt from LIB 545 arrived at Kaw Mar village, Kyar-in-seik-kyi township, Karen State. The villagers were accused of supporting the KNU and were ordered to move to Palaw Htoo Ki village in the tract. The names of the affected villages were Kaw Mar, Htee Wah Doe, Htee Kyaw Kee, Ya Kayar and Khaw Khet, all in Kaw Mar village track. (*Source: Yoma 3*)

◆ The SPDC's "Aung Moe Hein" operation, which aims to relocate villages in the Dawna range, Karen State, started in late August 1998. The operation is employing Division No. 44, commanded by Division Commander Toe Aung. LIB 3, LIB 9, LIB 118 and IB 81 (totalling about 900 soldiers) are being employed in Pine Kyone township and the rest of the Division's battalions have been sent to the area between Myawaddy and Pine Kyone for the same purpose. (*Source: KHRG*)

◆ Over 300 Karenni people from Don Poe, Pan Aw and Kay Do villages, Hso Mo township, who were located on Karenni-Shan border, were forcibly relocated into Wam Matt village center by the 29 August at 6 a.m deadline of given by Shadaw-based LIB 423 led by Maj. Thein Lwin. (*Source: HRDU*)

◆ On April 10, 1998, the LIB 284 displaced 15 Karen families living at Kyon Kwe village in Kawkareik township, Karen State, by destroying their houses. (*Source: MIS*)

◆ In the first week of May 1998, troops from LIB 230 ordered the Karen villagers living at Ka Toe Hta, Aung Laing, Sekkawet and Myo Haung in Kawkareik township, Karen State to move from their villages immediately. (*Source: MIS*)

◆ On May 2, 1998, IB 230 ordered the Karen villagers living in Katoke Hta village in Kyar-ein-seik-kyi township, Karen State, to vacate from the site in two days, telling them that they would be subjected to brutal measures if they did not act as ordered. (*Source: KIC*)

◆ Mae La-a, Mae Keh and Wah Mee Kho villages in Papun district, Karen State, have been burned down since the start of September. Mae La-a Khee, Wah Mee Klar, Htee Ka Haw, Pali Pu, Po Paw Lay, Nei Po Khee, Klay Po Klo and Ma Oh Pu, in the same region, have also been destroyed. LIB 9, which destroyed Mae La-a and Mae Keh villages, looted villagers' property and killed all livestock before setting the villages alight. (*Source: HRDU*)

◆ On October 18, 1998, about 80 soldiers from IB 247 led by commander Htun Win came to Nawng Pha village, Murng Nai township, Shan State. They arrested village headman Zitta in connection with a Shan armed group. When he said he knew nothing about the Shan armed group, the troops tortured him severely. After releasing him, the commander ordered Nawng Pha village to move to Ton Hoong village, Murng Nai township, within three days. The troops then continued to Waeng Kao village and Hota village to move to the same village within three days. The commander said no one would be allowed and have orders to come to the village and anyone found there would be shot dead. (*Source: SHRF*)

◆ On October 20, 1998, LIB 502 ordered Long Kaeng village in Murng Pan township, Shan State, to move to Murng Pan town. About 40-50 troops from LIB 502 led by commander Aye Thaung arrested the village headman and wrongfully accused him of not reporting an ethnic Shan group's activities to the army. He was tortured and the whole

village was ordered to move to Murng Pan town within three days. (*Source: SHRF*)

◆ On November 14, 1998, troops led by commander Aung Myint from LIB 502 in Murng Pan township, Shan State, came to Pakhar village, Murng Pan township, They ordered the villagers to move to Ho Phai Long village and Murng Pan town. (*Source: SHRF*)

◆ On December 15, 1998, Intelligence Officer, Captain Than Oo from IB 230 came to Meh Kanaw and Meh Kawa villages in Kawkareik township, Karen State, and ordered the villagers to move to Kyauk Baloo village in Wun Yae township within a week. (*Source: KIC*)

◆ On December 20, 1998, about 50 SPDC soldiers from Murang Tyon-based IB 225 killed the headman and villagers of Nar Niu village, seven miles west of Murng Ton town, Shan State. They were accused of tipping off the Shan armed group to ambush the SPDC troops. After the killing, the soldiers ordered Nar Niu village to move to the town. (*Source: SHRF*)