CHAPTER 4
Landmines and Other Explosive Devices
4.1 Introduction

The Human Rights Documentation Unit (HRDU) has monitored the manufacture and deployment of antipersonnel landmines and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) in Burma since 2000, when a separate chapter within the *Burma Human Rights Yearbook* was first dedicated to the topic. Over these past eight years, landmines have continued to be consistently manufactured and deployed throughout the country by State troops and Non-State Actors (NSAs) alike, both those allied with and those opposing the central military regime. Sadly, the year 2008 saw few positive developments in terms of the manufacture and deployment of antipersonnel landmines and other explosive devices in Burma.

As shall be seen in the pages which follow, this year, the HRDU has expanded and reorganized the present chapter to adequately address several other explosive devices which continue to plague the people of Burma, including Unexploded Ordinance (UXO) and Explosive Remnants of War (ERW), the series of bomb blasts which have rocked urban areas across the country, and the growing number of explosions on public buses.

During 2008, the HRDU documented at least 12 landmine and UXO/ERW-related deaths, along with a further 46 incidents which resulted in the victims sustaining serious injuries (but not death). The vast majority of these landmine incidents involved members of the civilian population. Meanwhile, nine more people were killed and a further 15 injured in 22 separate bomb blasts in various urban areas across the country.

Moreover, an additional nine civilians were killed and another three seriously wounded when the public buses that they were travelling on suddenly and unexpectedly exploded, seemingly as a result of gross negligence rather than the detonation of planted explosive devices.

Throughout 2008, the HRDU documented a total of at least 28 deaths and a further 64 injuries occurring through explosions and explosive devices in Burma. Each of these incidents is described in detail over the following pages. However, it must be noted here, as elsewhere throughout the *Burma Human Rights Yearbook 2008*, that while these figures are high, the HRDU believes that they are still quite conservative and that the number of fatalities arising from exposure to landmines and other explosive devices in Burma is higher than that reported.
4.2 Landmines and Improvised Explosive Devices

As in previous years, antipersonnel landmines and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) continued to be used throughout Burma during 2008. Armed groups on both sides of the ongoing conflict including the SPDC armed forces, numerous ethnic ceasefire groups allied with them, and several armed opposition groups continued to deploy landmines in their areas of operations. In December 2008, a representative of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) stated that, “Burma is the one country that has consistently used landmines on a widespread bases [sic.]; [and] it is the only one doing so globally”.¹

In late 2007, it was speculated that as many as two million landmines had been deployed throughout Burma, the majority of which had been laid in ethnic areas bordering neighbouring countries.² During 2008, landmines continued to be deployed in civilian areas, which, along with those deployed in previous years, resulted in numerous civilian injuries and deaths. According to the same representative of the ICBL, “Antipersonnel mines planted by both [SPDC army] forces and ethnic armed groups injure and kill not only enemy combatants but also their own troops, civilians and animals,” adding that “many injuries occur within half a kilometre of village centres”.³ Landmines, once laid, can remain a hidden and indiscriminate threat for civilian populations many years, even long after the conflict has ceased or moved on to another area.

As of 31 October 2008, over 80 percent of the world’s nations, or 156 States, had condemned the use of antipersonnel landmines by either signing or acceding to the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (also known as and henceforth referred to as the Mine Ban Treaty). Burma, however, is not among this number and remains one of only 39 countries yet to accede to the Convention. Furthermore, the SPDC has shown little indication that they plan on doing so at any time in the foreseeable future.

The SPDC did not attend the Eighth Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty (MBT) in Jordan in November 2007. However, though Burma is not a States Party to the 1980 Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (commonly referred to as the Convention on Conventional Weapons; CCW), they did send an observer to the Meeting of States Parties to the Convention in Geneva in November 2007. On 5 December 2007, Burma was one of only 18 countries to abstain from voting on United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 62/41 calling on the universalization of the Mine Ban Treaty (MBT). Moreover, the SPDC failed to attend both the workshop on the universalization and implementation of the MBT in Indonesia in February 2008 as well as the Intersessional Standing Committee Meetings on the MBT in Geneva in June 2008.⁴
Landmine Production and Acquisition

According to the *Landmine Monitor 2008*, published by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), Burma continued to be one of only 13 countries known to still produce antipersonnel landmines.\(^5\)

It is believed that in the early 1990’s the Chinese Government supplied the SPDC with a purpose-built munitions factory in Meiktila, Mandalay Division that was devoted to the manufacture of antipersonnel (AP) landmines. Some sources maintain that this factory works in tandem with a series of explosives factories located in Prome in Pegu Division and Magwe in Magwe Division that had originally been built in the 1960’s under the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP) regime.\(^6\) Another factory is also said to exist at Nyaung Chay Dauk in Pegu Division.\(^7\) At different times, these factories have been collectively referred to as either the KaPaSa factories (abbreviated from Karkweye Pyitsu Setyoun, the Burmese name for the Directorate of Defence Industries), or the Myanmar Defence Products Industries (MDPI). In response to HRDU queries, representatives of the ICBL have stated that for the purpose of their reports, they “consider KaPaSa and Myanmar Defense [Sic.] Products Industries as one and the same”.\(^8\) For the purposes of the current report, the HRDU shall do the same, but henceforth use the term Myanmar Defence Products Industries (MDPI) when referring to the factories.

Some sources maintain that the MDPI “consists of 13 major factories throughout the country that produce approximately 70 major products for Army, Navy and Air Force”. The factories are said to manufacture everything from brass and tungsten carbide for use in weapons and casings; to a variety of ammunition for small arms, medium and heavy artillery, and tanks; propellants; small arms and machineguns; and grenades and other explosives (including landmines).\(^9\)

At least four different types of antipersonnel landmines are known to be manufactured in these factories, including two Blast Mines (BM), one Stake Fragmentation Mine (SFM), and one Directional Fragmentation Mine (DFM). Each of these mines is described in detail below.

The MM-1 is a copy of the Chinese-made Type 58 Stake Fragmentation Mine (SFM), which itself is a copy of the older Soviet POMZ-2 or 'Corncob' mine. Some sources have incorrectly identified this mine as being a copy of the POMZ-2M / Type 59 which only possesses five rows of fragmentation, rather than the six rows of the POMZ-2 / Type 58. The mine is deployed by mounting it above ground on a stake, typically beside a path and concealed by long grass or bushes, with a tripwire attached to the detonator. Upon detonation, the cast iron body of the mine shatters into 60 pre-formed segments which are thrown outwards in a 360 degree arc with a lethal radius of four metres. The MM-1 can also be buried in the ground with only the detonator exposed. Of the two deployment methods, the former is the more dangerous, as it will not only kill the person who triggered it, but will also likely kill or seriously injure anyone else within the blast radius.\(^10\)

The MM-2 is a replica of the Chinese-made Type 58 Blast Mine (BM), which in turn is a copy of the Soviet PMN-1 mine. While perhaps not as lethal as the MM-1, the MM-2 still contains enough explosive force to destroy the victim’s entire leg, due to the addition of 240 grams of TNT (four times that used in most AP landmines). The MM-2 is deployed by burying it so that the pressure plate which forms its upper surface is level with the ground. Victims of this mine will often require a transfemoral (above the knee) amputation and also sustain considerable damage to the adjacent limb.\(^11\)
In addition to the MM-1 and MM-2, the SPDC is also capable of producing a copy of the US-made M-14 Blast Mine, although what designation this mine is given in SPDC army arsenals is unknown. The diminutive minimum metal mine stands only 40 mm high and 56 mm in diameter.\(^{12}\) The low metal content has made this mine particularly difficult to find using traditional minesweeping techniques. Armed with only 29 grams of Tetryl, this mine lacks the explosive force of either the MM-1 or the MM-2. However, what this device lacks in power, the SPDC has made up for with quantity, with some sources reporting this mine to have been laid in parts of eastern Burma “in their thousands” in the past few years.\(^{13}\)

The SPDC also manufactures its own variant of the US-made M-18 ‘Claymore’ Directional Fragmentation Mine (DFM). This highly dangerous mine can be rigged to be either command-activated through the use of a hand dynamo or victim-activated by attaching it to a tripwire. Upon activation, the 680 grams of C4 explosive, which constitutes almost half of the mine’s weight, explodes, launching 700 small steel balls out in a 60 degree arc with a stated lethal range of up to 50 metres. Anything caught within this lethal arc upon detonation will likely be cut to ribbons. While the lethal range is 50 metres, the danger zone stretches out to 250 metres in front of the mine and a further 18 metres behind it.\(^{14}\)

In addition to those mines which are manufactured domestically, the SPDC also deploys mines of foreign manufacture obtained on the international arms market. For example, at different times in the past, the central regime has also used mines of Chinese, Soviet, Indian, and US manufacture. Included among these mines have been the: Chinese Types 58 and 59 SFM, Type 58 BM, Type 72A BM, Type 69 BFM, and Type 69 DFM; Soviet POMZ-2 SFM, POMZ-2M SFM, PMN BM, and PMD-6 BM; US M-14 BM, M-16A1 Bounding Fragmentation Mine (BFM), and M-18 DFM; and Indian/British LTM-73 BM, and LTM-76 BM.\(^{15}\)

On top of these mines which have all been previously recognized, at least two ‘new’ mines were identified as being used in Burma during 2008. In October 2008, the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) published numerous photographs of what was later identified by landmine experts to be a US-manufactured M-26 Bounding Fragmentation Mine (BFM).\(^{16}\) While this mine had previously been photographed and reported on first in 2001 and again in 2005, both times by the KHRG,\(^{17}\) this mine remained unidentified until only very recently when better quality photographs of it were made available (See photographs reproduced on the following page).

The M-26 is deployed by burying the device in the ground so that its upper surface sits just below ground level, and can be activated either through direct pressure (by stepping on it) or through the use of one of the four tripwires attached to it. The M-26 is a bounding mine, meaning that when triggered, a small booster (or secondary) charge located in the base of the mine detonates, propelling the mine approximately two metres into the air, where the primary charge of 170 grams of Composition B explosive detonates.\(^{18}\) The M-26 has a stated lethal radius of ten metres, and according to some sources is considered so dangerous that the US Army stopped deploying it decades ago after US Army Engineers had labelled it “too dangerous” to handle.\(^{19}\) A representative of the ICBL has referred to the M-26 as “the most dangerous mine that I have ever seen in the country [Burma]”.\(^{20}\) It remains unclear exactly how the SPDC has acquired these mines, as they have never been sold on the international arms market, and aside from the US, have only been known to have been possessed by three other countries, namely: the Republic of Korea (South Korea), Thailand and El Salvador.\(^{21}\) While it is not yet known, it is possible that the SPDC purchased a number of these mines on the black market after they had been stolen from Thai arsenals. At the time of publication, investigations into the origin of these mines were said to be ongoing.\(^{22}\)
According to reports published by the KHRG, KNLA soldiers from the KNLA #7 Brigade removed the M-26 AP landmine shown in the following photographs from a forest trail in T’Moh village tract of Dta Greh Township, Karen State on 28 August 2008. However, it would seem that whoever deployed it was not familiar with its use given that it had been planted upside down and unarmed. Commenting on the condition of the mine shown in the following photographs, a representative of the ICBL has stated that:

"The mine is an American made M26. Where it came from is a mystery to our experts as they state the mine is extremely rare. The mine … was brand new, and laid by someone who did not understand how it worked. [The] photographs showed that it had been laid upside down. Our experts noted that one of your pictures showed that the arming pin [was] in place, so the mine was probably not armed. The internal trip wire spool in the base of the mine was still in storage position, and the tripwire lever was also in its storage position."23

These photographs show a US-manufactured M-26 Bounding Fragmentation Mine (BFM) that was planted by SPDC army soldiers on a forest trail in Dta Greh Township, Karen State. These images, taken on 26 August 2008 as the mine was being lifted from the ground by a KNLA soldier, show that this highly dangerous mine had been laid upside down; ironic given that once triggered, bounding mines spring up out of the ground and detonate around head height. While it is now apparent that the SPDC has been in possession of these mines since at least 2001, it remains unknown where they have been acquiring them from. [Photos: © KHRG]
On 19 December 2008, the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) reported finding a new type of antipersonnel landmine never before recorded as having been deployed in Burma (See the photograph reproduced below). The mine was reportedly discovered near Muthey village in the vicinity of the Kyauk Kyi to Saw Hta motor road which bisects Nyaunglebin District of Karen State. At a casual glance, these mines appear far more sophisticated than the landmines that the SPDC is known to manufacture domestically. On a simple inspection of the available photographs, this appears to be an Italian-made VAR/40 minimum metal antipersonnel blast mine. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) has responded to enquiries by the HRDU confirming that this diminutive mine is indeed the VAR/40. According to a representative from the ICBL, the mine shown in the photograph below was not armed and was in its storage condition, suggesting that it had accidentally been dropped rather than deployed. It remains unclear if this mine had come from SPDC, DKBA or KNLA arsenals; however, the ICBL has stated having received one previous report of this mine being deployed by the KNLA. Regardless of who is responsible for possessing these mines, it still remains unclear where they have been obtaining them from as the mine is no longer in production and the company responsible for producing them, Tecnovar Italiana, has long since gone out of business.24

In addition to those mines deployed by the SPDC, antipersonnel landmines were also laid by numerous Non-State Actors (NSAs) operating in Burma during 2008. The ICBL has identified no fewer than 17 NSAs who have used landmines in Burma since the ICBL began monitoring the situation in 1999. These include armed groups both allied with and opposing the central military regime, although it should be noted that this number also includes some groups which have either “ceased to exist or no longer use mines”.25

Of those Non-State groups known to use landmines, a number are also known to be capable of manufacturing their own mines and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Such groups include: the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the Karen National Union / Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council (KNU/KNLA PC), and the Karenni Army (KA).26 It is believed that all of these groups are able to manufacture simple blast and fragmentation mines, while some groups as the KNU, DKBA, and KNU/KNLA PC are also known to possess the capability of producing ‘Claymore’-type directional fragmentation mines. The ICBL has
further alleged that “some” of these groups further possess the expertise to manufacture mines and IEDs with anti-handling fuses. Meanwhile, the UWSA assembles its own copies of the MM-2 blast mine in a purpose-built munitions factory formerly owned and operated by the now-defunct Communist Party of Burma (CPB). These mines, like those manufactured by the SPDC, are far more sophisticated and durable than the IEDs produced by other Non-State groups, most of which are built from locally and cheaply-available materials such as bamboo tubes, plastic PVC piping, or glass bottles and packed with gunpowder, a small amount of explosive (which may include TNT, ANFO or urea nitrate), and ball bearings or metal shavings or other similar forms of fragmentation. One such locally-produced IED is shown in the following photograph. This device, made by DKBA soldiers during 2008 consists of a block of wood with a raised splint on one side. The electrical wire wrapped around the block is attached to a commercially-available alkaline battery which powers the detonator attached to a small amount of explosive. When stepped on, the wires attached to the wooden splint are pressed up against those wrapped around the block, creating an electrical circuit to ignite the detonator and thus explode. Such homemade mines possess far shorter lifespans than factory-produced devices and typically display a tendency to fail within six months of deployment as the battery dies or the natural materials used in their construction degrade in the forest environment.

This Improvised Explosive Device (IED) was built and deployed by DKBA soldiers from #999 Special Battalion in Dta Greh Township of Pa’an District, Karen State. Homemade mines of this sort, built with a block of wood, some gunpowder, a simple commercially-available alkaline battery and detonator is common among the various NSA’s on both sides of the conflict in Burma. [Photo: © KHRG]

Besides the devices that they produce themselves, those Non-State groups using landmines also acquire and deploy factory-produced mines by redeploying SPDC-laid mines lifted from the ground, seizing mines in raids on SPDC arsenals, or acquiring them on the clandestine arms market.
Landmine Deployment

Not only was Burma identified as a continuing producer of landmines during 2008, but also as one of only three countries in which the national armed forces continued to deploy antipersonnel landmines (along with Russia and quite likely Sri Lanka). According to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the SPDC “used antipersonnel mines extensively [throughout 2008], as they have every year since Landmine Monitor began reporting in 1999”.31

According to the ICBL, ten of Burma’s 14 states and divisions suffer from landmine contamination. Only Kachin State, and Rangoon (Yangon), Irrawaddy (Ayeyarwady) and Magwe Divisions have not recorded mine use. Meanwhile, the eastern border areas of Karen (Kayin), Karenni (Kayah) and Shan States and Tenasserim (Tanintharyi) Division are reportedly the most extensively mined.32 The western borders shared with India and Bangladesh are also reportedly also heavily mined. While little information has been made available on the level of mine contamination along the Burma-China border, the HRDU believes that it is quite extensive. Successive Burmese military regimes have extensively deployed landmines along Burma’s borders in an attempt to prevent the exodus of refugees into neighbouring countries, as well as to dissuade those who have already fled from returning.

During 2008, antipersonnel landmine use was recorded in Karen (Kayin), Karenni (Kayah), Mon, Shan, and Arakan (Rakhine) States, as well as in Pegu and Tenasserim (Tanintharyi) Divisions.33

The annual Landmine Monitor reported in November 2008 that reported mine casualties in Burma had increased by approximately 180 percent from 243 in 2006 to 438 in 2007, placing Burma in the unenviable position of possessing the world’s third highest rate of reported mine incidents during 2007 (behind Columbia and Afghanistan, with 895 and 811 reported mine casualties, respectively). Although the ICBL admits this figure to still be quite conservative. Of 438 reported incidents, 47 cases resulted in deaths, 338 in non-fatal injuries, and 53 with an unknown outcome. It was reported that 409 cases were due to landmines, while the remaining 29 were caused by “unknown or unconfirmed devices”. These statistics placed the number of reported mine casualties in Burma ahead of Cambodia for the first time since 1999 when the Landmine Monitor began monitoring the situation in Burma. Moreover, Burma has shown a 330 percent increase in reported mine casualties since 2004.34 It should be noted; however, that these statistics do not necessarily indicate intensified levels of landmine deployment, but rather an increase in the number of cases that have been reported. While the ICBL has claimed that the spike has been due to greater levels of armed conflict, it is more likely that the increase reflects a rise in the number of organizations reporting on landmine casualties and their improved efficiency in doing so.

The SPDC army is responsible for the vast majority of antipersonnel landmines which have been deployed in Burma, and during 2008, SPDC army soldiers continued to deploy mines in large numbers across the country. In addition to using landmines in the perimeter defence of their military bases and during ambushes mounted against armed opposition groups, SPDC army units have consistently deployed landmines in areas known to be frequented by civilians, including along forest trails and paths, in and around civilian villages and in their fields and plantations. The SPDC has used landmines to restrict villagers’ access to certain areas at the same time as confining them to other areas. For example, mines are often laid in abandoned, destroyed and forcibly relocated villages to prevent villagers from attempting to return to or resettle in the area. Similarly, mines have also been deployed around many forced relocation sites to discourage those interned there from trying to leave.
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The manner in which SPDC army forces deploy landmines throughout Burma indicates that there is a discernible failure on the part of the State to ensure that adequate care is taken to prevent civilian mine casualties. Furthermore, patterns discerned from the SPDC army mine-laying stratagem also strongly suggest that non-combative civilian populations are the primary intended targets of SPDC-laid mines. The deliberate targeting of civilians in this manner violates not only numerous international laws, many of which have long since been ascribed \textit{jus cogens} status, but also several of Burma’s own domestic laws.\textsuperscript{35}

It is thus not surprising that the vast majority of landmine injuries in Burma each year involve civilians. For example, of the 409 mine casualties reported by the \textit{Landmine Monitor 2008}, only nine cases involved military personnel, while the remaining 400 incidents involved civilians.\textsuperscript{36} According to the ICBL, almost half (44 percent) of these casualties occurred as the victims were attending to their livelihoods, with the most common activities conducted at the time of the incident being: “foraging for forest and jungle produce or collecting wood (46), traveling [Sic.] (22), engaged in agriculture (19), portering (18), and during instances of forced labor [Sic.] (16).”\textsuperscript{37} One possible explanation for why there have been so few reported cases of military mine casualties could be that none of the armed groups operating in Burma readily disclose information regarding mine casualties among their ranks. It is thus quite likely that the number of soldiers who are wounded and killed by landmines in Burma each year is considerably higher than what little is reported.

The fact that mined areas are rarely marked, signposted or fenced only serves to exacerbate the problem, which ultimately results in a high frequency of mine injuries among civilian populations living in the vicinity of these areas. (For more information, see the subsequent sections dealing with “Mine Risk Education” below).

In addition to those civilians who lose their lives and limbs to landmines, many villagers’ also lose their livestock which are often maimed and/or killed after wandering into mined areas. For example, in November 2008, there were two separate cases of cattle being killed by landmines in Arakan and Karen States on 13 and 27 November 2008, respectively. (For more information, see the two incidents below shown for those dates).

The presence of landmines, whether it is known or alleged, further impacts upon the lives of villagers who also typically lose access to their fields and thus their livelihoods for fear of unearthing or stepping on a mine that may have been laid there. (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood).

Furthermore, the ICBL has reported that during 2008, Burma was one of only nine countries in which antipersonnel landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were used by Non-State Actors (NSAs).\textsuperscript{38} Non-State groups operating on both sides of the conflict; both those allied with and those opposing the SPDC, have been guilty of using mines, and continued armed conflict throughout 2008 in the areas where many of these groups operate has perpetuated the problem. The ICBL has identified at least seven NSAs who used landmines in Burma during 2008, including the SPDC-allied Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), United Wa State Army (UWSA), and Southern Shan State Army (SSS), and the opposition Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), Karenni Army (KA), Shan State Army – South (SSA-S), and Monland Restoration Party (MRP), along with “several other NSAGs [Non-State Armed Groups]”.\textsuperscript{39}

It must be noted, however, that though a number of NSAs have been identified as mine users, the extent of their use by all such groups is significantly lower than that of the SPDC. Moreover, the manner in which most of these groups deploy their mines also differs considerably from that of the SPDC.
As in previous years, a number of Burma’s ‘ceasefire groups’ continued to use landmines during 2008 as one of their favoured methods of targeting armed opposition groups, to divide civilian populations from those groups, and to directly target the civilian population themselves. For example, there were numerous incidents reported throughout the year from Karen State of civilian villagers being injured and killed by DKBA landmines which had been deployed on the paths they use, in their fields and in their villages. According to one report filed by the Free Burma Rangers (FBR), DKBA soldiers had allegedly crossed the border into Thailand and laid a number of landmines along the border, one of which was stepped on by a soldier attached to the Royal Thai Army (RTA) on 11 October 2008. (For more information, see the incident below dated 14 October 2008).

Meanwhile, several of Burma’s armed opposition groups continued to use landmines throughout 2008 in ambushes against SPDC army units and their allied ceasefire armies and to protect villagers and internally displaced communities from attack. While some of these groups claim to remove any unexploded landmines so as to minimise the risk to local populations, civilian villagers continued to be wounded, maimed and killed by the very landmines which had ostensibly been deployed to protect them. The Karen National Union (KNU), for example, has a stated policy of not only informing villagers of the locations of their mines, but also of removing mines when they are no longer deemed necessary (see the box below for the KNU Landmine Policy). In keeping with this policy, in December 2008, Saw Di Kwe, deputy battalion commander of KNLA Battalion #22, based in Pa’an District, Karen State insisted that:

“We use more landmines only when we hear our enemy [SPDC] is preparing to attack, when they retreat, we remove our landmines. Furthermore, we document our landmines areas [Sic.] in maps and inform villagers where they are. Unlike our enemies, we do not use them on paths or places where villagers usually are.”

However, despite these claims, in May 2008, an unnamed 24-year-old villager from Papun District, Karen State lost his right foot to a KNLA-deployed landmine while working in his hill field. In this particular incident, it is apparent not only that the mine had been laid in an area frequented by civilians but also that the soldiers responsible for deploying the mine had failed to inform the villagers of its presence. For more information, see the incident and accompanying photograph below.

### KNU Landmine Policy

1. We use landmines to defend our people, our land and our base camps.
2. Our landmines are small, handmade of plastic pipe or bamboo, they only have a six-month lifespan.
3. If the enemy attack, we use, when they retreat we remove them.
4. If we put landmines in, we inform villagers where they are.
5. Our landmines are small, they are designed to wound, slow the enemy and delay their troop movements.
6. We don’t want to use mines, but because of our situation – our army is small – we use them with restriction.
On 12 January 2008, the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) reported that a month earlier, on 12 December 2007, two men and one woman were injured when an SPDC-deployed landmine exploded as they were performing forced labour maintaining a fence around an electricity pylon in Karenni State. According to the original report, the three villagers from Daw Paw Kler and No No villages in northern Karenni State had received their orders from LIB #261 to perform labour on one of the electricity pylons which form the electricity transmission line running from the hydroelectricity power plant near Lawpita. The ICBL later argued based on the available information, that the villagers were “injured while repairing a fence around what appears to have been a minefield laid by the [SPDC] military.”

This photograph, taken in January 2008, shows Hsa K’Tray Saw, 13, blinded by an SPDC army landmine on 16 November 2007 as he returned to Lay Kee village with his family to see what could be salvaged from their abandoned village. For more information, see the incident below dated 22 January 2008. [Photo: © FBR]

On 22 January 2008, the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) reported that 13-year-old Saw Hsa T’Kray Saw was blinded by shrapnel from an SPDC-laid landmine in Toungoo District, Karen State on 16 November 2007. According to the report, Hsa T’Kray Saw and a number of his fellow villagers had returned to Lay Kee village to salvage what food and other belongings that were left behind after they had abandoned the village just before it was attacked by an SPDC army unit in August 2007. As he was waiting for his mother to return from collecting vegetables, he accidentally triggered a landmine which the SPDC army soldiers had planted in the village after the villagers had fled deliberately targeting any villager who returned to collect their belongings. The blast sent shrapnel into his torso and face, which left him blinded. The photograph reproduced above shows Saw Hsa T’Kray Saw as he was receiving medical attention from FBR medics in January 2008.

On 13 March 2008, 16-year-old Naw Dah Gay Paw from Htee Mu Kee village in Papun District of northern Karen State lost her left foot after stepping on an SPDC-deployed landmine. According to the report published by the Free Burma Rangers (FBR), Naw Dah Gay Paw fled into the forest, along with approximately 1,700 other villagers when SPDC army units began mounting military assaults on undefended civilian villages in the area. It was believed that the SPDC army soldiers had laid many landmines in abandoned villages and on trails used by villagers as they moved through the region. The two photographs shown on the following page show Naw Dah Gay Paw at an unidentified clinic where she received treatment for her injuries.
On 23 March 2008, Saw Wah Lay Mu, a civilian Karen villager from Aung Soe Moe village in Toungoo District, Karen State was wounded after stepping on a landmine which had been laid in the vicinity of his fields. It is believed that the mine had been deployed by SPDC army soldiers operating in the region.45

Also on 23 March 2008, Saw Hta Sei was killed by an SPDC-laid landmine near Kay Pu village in Lu Thaw Township of Papun District, Karen State. Though there is some disagreement over the victim’s name, it is quite possible that this is the same incident which KHRG maintain claimed the life of “Saw Plah See”. Unfortunately, little other information has been made available regarding this incident.46

These two photographs depict 16-year-old Naw Dah Gay Paw at an unidentified clinic in Papun District, Karen State after stepping on an SPDC-laid landmine as she was attempting to flee from an advancing SPDC army unit. As can be seen in the photographs, the force of the blast blew off her left foot and also wounded her right leg. For more information, see the incident on the preceding page dated 13 March 2008. [Photos: © FBR]

It was reported that during April 2008, SPDC army soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #363 launched attacks on numerous civilian villages situated to the east of the Day Loh River in Toungoo District Karen State, including, but not limited to: Ler Ker Der Kho village, K’Yeh Yu village, Sho Ko village, Pra Mu Der village, Haw Law Gaw Lu Der, and Naw Kwe Koh village. The SPDC has never been able to maintain a presence in this area and have thus mounted regular attacks throughout this area over the past decade. A number of
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villages were abandoned after their inhabitants fled into the surrounding forest ahead of the approaching SPDC army column. Some of the villages were destroyed by the soldiers and many were sewn with landmines in an attempt to dissuade the villagers from attempting to return to their homes or from collecting their belongings. A number of fields along with the trails leading to them were also reported as being mined by the departing soldiers. As a result, one villager was killed, and at least four were injured as they tried to return to their homes or farms to see what of their belongings they could salvage. On 20 April 2008, 52-year-old Naw Ku Say from Ler Ko village was wounded after stepping on a landmine. Two days later, on 22 April 2008, Saw Shwe Htet Moo Oo, 28, from Koh Haw Der village, bled to death after stepping on an SPDC-deployed landmine. The following day, on 23 April 2008, 25-year-old Saw Lah Pwe from Ler Ko village also fell victim to an SPDC army landmine. At the time of the original report, his status remained unknown. On 26 April 2008, Tha Yay Yuh villager, Saw Shee Sho, 25, lost his right foot to yet another SPDC-deployed landmine. Finally, on 3 May 2008, 27-year-old Naw Baw Yu from Sho Ko village, who had just returned home to visit her family after studying in Toungoo, stepped on a landmine which reportedly “destroyed her left leg”.47

On 22 April 2008, an unnamed Karen villager died after stepping on an SPDC landmine in an unspecified part of Karen State. The accompanying photograph shown above shows him as Karen medics worked to amputate his leg.48

This photograph, taken on 22 April 2008 shows a Karen medical team in the process of amputating a villager’s leg after he had stepped on an SPDC army landmine. The unnamed villager reportedly later died, despite the best efforts of the medics who had attempted to help him. For more information, see the preceding incident dated 22 April 2008. [Photo: © FBR]

On 3 May 2008, an unnamed 21-year-old Karen woman had to have what remained of her left leg amputated after stepping on an SPDC-deployed landmine in Toungoo District, Karen State. See the photograph reproduced at the top of the following page.49

On an unspecified date in May 2008, an unnamed 24-year-old Karen villager from Htee Moo Kee village in Papun District, Karen State stepped on a landmine originally planted by KNLA soldiers. According to the source, he had been working in his hill field at Taw Moh Bpleh Meh in the vicinity of an SPDC army camp when he stepped on the mine. While the KNU claims that they inform local villagers of the locations of the mines they deploy and never lay landmines in areas frequented by civilians, this incident would suggest otherwise. The photograph reproduced at the bottom of the following page shows the victim as he was receiving medical care at an unidentified clinic on 23 May 2008.50
A 24-year-old civilian villager from Htee Moo Kee village in Papun District, Karen State receiving medical care after stepping on a KNLA-laid landmine in his hill field near an SPDC army camp at Taw Moh Bpleh Meh. For more information, see the incident listed on the bottom of the preceding page.

[Photo: © KHRG]

The Free Burma Rangers (FBR) reported that an unnamed villager from Kyaw Nger village in Nyaunglebin District, Karen State had stepped on a landmine on an unspecified date in the first half of June 2008. According to report, which was deliberately vague on the details, presumably to protect the victim from repercussions, the villager had stepped on the landmine while attempting to mine for gold in the Kyaung Chay Thit Zone 4 area of Mone Township. The unnamed villager had allegedly approached a KNU officer for permission to mine for gold in the area, however, this permission was denied as the area was deemed off-limits. Despite this, the villager went ahead and entered the area anyway, stepping on the landmine in doing so. It remains unclear why the area was considered off limits by the KNU or who was responsible for having laid the landmine, although the SPDC has blamed the KNU for having planted the landmine. The villager was reportedly then taken to hospital in Kyauk Kyi for treatment where he was visited and interrogated at length by Tactical Operations Commander #2, Khin Maung Oo over the incident.51

Free Burma Rangers (FBR) medics performing a transfemoral (above the knee) amputation on a 21-year-old Karen woman after she stepped on an SPDC-laid landmine in Toungoo district in May 2008. Due to limited resources, such procedures are often performed in the absence of anaesthetic. For more information, see the incident dated 3 May 2008 on the preceding page. [Photo: © FBR]
On 24 June 2008, Saw Than Maung from Ma La Daw village in Karen State stepped on a SPDC-deployed landmine in the vicinity of Ta Kwey Lay Ko village in Mone Township of Nyaunglebin District. The original report failed to mention whether he had been killed or only wounded by the mine. His fate remains unknown.52

In the first half of August 2008, an unnamed SPDC army corporal from LIB #387 stepped on a landmine at Ka Moe Chi Kon village in the Wah Kee area of Kyauk Kyi Township, Karen State. In response, local SPDC army battalions enforced a blanket ban on travel between the plains and the hills, severely impacting upon local communities’ livelihoods.53

On an unspecified date in August 2008, an unnamed KNLA soldier stepped on an SPDC-deployed landmine near Nya Baw Di Kee village in Lu Pleh Township of Pa’an District in Karen State. No other information was provided and his fate remains unknown.54

On 22 August 2008, KHRG reported that so far that year as many as seven civilian villagers had been wounded by landmines in Papun District of Karen State alone, and that two of the victims had died as a result of their injuries. The following table details these seven incidents. Many of the details were omitted in the original report to protect the victims from further repercussions.55

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Name of Victim</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 March 2008</td>
<td>Naw D---</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Ht--- village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 March 2008</td>
<td>Saw Plah See</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Kay Pu village</td>
<td>Killed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 April 2008</td>
<td>Saw B---</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>K--- village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 May 2008</td>
<td>Saw Hs---</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>T--- village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 May 2008</td>
<td>Saw Gk'---</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>K--- village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 May 2008</td>
<td>Saw P---</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Gk--- village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 June 2008</td>
<td>Saw Gkler Htoo</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hih Po Der village</td>
<td>Killed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On 23 August 2008, Saw Maung Soe, 19, from Meh K’Naw village in Papun District, Karen State lost his right leg after stepping on a landmine. “The landmine was close to the river side. I was lucky I went with my friend. … He looked after me and took me to my home”, Saw Maung Soe said after the event. His family arranged to send him to a hospital in Mae Sot, Thailand for treatment – six hours away by car. His right leg was amputated above the knee and he spent the following ten days recovering in the hospital before returning home. Once his leg had healed sufficiently, he returned to Mae Sot to be fitted for a prosthetic leg at the Mae Tao Clinic (MTC). At the time of the original report, he was still awaiting his prosthesis.56

On 5 September 2008, Naw Say Paw, a 60-year-old Karen villager was killed by an SPDC army landmine in the Hsaw Wah Der area of Toungoo District, Karen State. Naw Say Paw, who had been forcibly relocated to an SPDC-garrisoned relocation site in the plains of western Toungoo District was killed as she returned to the hills to inspect her plantation, unaware that SPDC army troops attached to MOC #10 had sewn it with landmines.57

On 11 September 2008, two persons were killed and a further nine were wounded following two separate blasts, both believed to have been caused by landmines planted in downtown Kyauk Kyi, western Karen State. The mines, deployed outside a local video parlour and a nearby pharmacy were reported to have been detonated almost simultaneously. The names of the deceased were not given in the original article. It was reported that while landmine blasts occur on a regular basis in nearby rural areas, such explosions were “considered rare” within built up areas. According to an article in the SPDC-controlled New Light of Myanmar, Saw Ya Ko from KNLA Battalion #20 was arrested the following day for having deployed the
mines. This accusation was flatly denied by the KNU in a statement issued on 22 September; not particularly surprising inasmuch as there is no KNLA Battalion #20.\textsuperscript{58}

On 25 September 2008, 35-year-old Saw M--- from Play Hsa Loh village in Toungoo District of Karen State stepped on an SPDC-laid landmine near his cardamom plantation. The force of the blast destroyed the lower portion of Saw M---'s right leg. He later received treatment at a nearby but unidentified clinic. (For more information, see the photograph reproduced below in the "Victim Assistance" section).\textsuperscript{59}

At approximately 7:20 am on 10 October 2008, 42-year-old Saw Pha Klae from Htee Per Wah village in Lu Pleh Township of Pa’an District, Karen State lost his left foot to a landmine. The incident reportedly occurred as Saw Pha Klae had returned to the burned out shell of his former home in Htee Per Kee village to retrieve his pig. While the source stated that he had been forcibly relocated to Htee Per Wah village by DKBA soldiers, it was not said who had laid the landmine. The deployment of landmines in relocated, abandoned or destroyed villages in rural Burma is a common practice employed by both the SPDC and the DKBA as a deterrent for villagers who may wish to return to resettle or to salvage what they can from the village.\textsuperscript{60}

On 14 October 2008, it was reported that DKBA soldiers from #906, #907, and #333 Battalions operating in Dooplaya District of Karen State had recently commenced a fresh operation of mine laying as part of its ongoing campaign against Karen villagers and KNLA forces operating in the area. It was reported that on 11 October 2008, an unnamed Royal Thai Army (RTA) soldier was wounded after stepping on a landmine as his unit investigated a recent attack on a civilian village close to the border. The original report failed to clearly state which side of the border the Thai unit was operating on, but it is believed to have been on the Thai side and that the DKBA soldiers had illegally crossed the border to circumvent KNLA defences.\textsuperscript{61}

On 28 October 2008, the FBR reported that a combined column of SPDC army and DKBA troops had commenced a fresh wave of attacks against civilian villages in parts of Pa’an and Dooplaya Districts of Southern Karen State. According to the report, approximately 150 soldiers moved through the area attacking villages and deploying landmines to limit the movement of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The FBR maintained that the deployment of landmines was “making it very difficult for villagers to return to their villages and salvage food or belongings”. Despite the dangers, some had attempted to do so and four villagers had been injured in the process.\textsuperscript{62}

On 2 November 2008, two Karen villagers from Blah Toh village were injured in a landmine blast near Kler Law Say in Dooplaya District, Karen State. According to the report carried in the Karen-language \textit{Kwekalu} newspaper, the two unnamed men had been forced to porter supplies for a combined SPDC and DKBA column during an assault on the KNLA #201 battalion headquarters at Wah Lay Kee. One of the villagers reportedly died immediately, while the other had been seriously wounded and left for dead by the SPDC/DKBA column. The survivor was later found by KNLA soldiers who arranged to send him to a hospital in Umphang, Thailand.\textsuperscript{63}

On 5 November 2008, it was reported that four civilian villagers from Ker Law Lu and Htee Per Kee villages in Dooplaya District, Karen State had recently been wounded by landmines newly deployed by DKBA soldiers. The original report failed to mention to names of the victims or any further details.\textsuperscript{64}

On 13 November 2008, a cow which had been grazing in a fallow paddy field, stepped on and was killed by an SPDC-deployed landmine in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State. The mine, deployed near border marker #44 near Kudik Kong village, was believed to have been
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laid by NaSaKa personnel, who had been reported to have laid mines between border markers #37 and #58. It was reported that NaSaKa personnel had been planting large numbers of mines along the Burma-Bangladesh border since early November 2008, in response to heightened tensions between the two nations “over gas and oil exploration in the Bay of Bengal”.

In the early hours of 15 November 2008, a landmine exploded near the Kon Don border checkpoint in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State. Very little information regarding the blast has been made available, but local sources have reported that they believe the mine had been triggered by smugglers.

On 27 November 2008, KHRG field researchers photographed a water buffalo which had been killed by a DKBA landmine in Dta Greh Township of Pa’an District, Karen State. Villagers are not the only ones at risk of landmines deployed in rural areas of Burma. Large numbers of villagers’ livestock also fall victim to landmines each year as they graze.

It was reported in December 2008 that 30-year-old Saw Pha Nya Lu from Kaw Thu Kee village lost his right foot to a DKBA-laid landmine as he was attending to his crop in Lu Pleh Township of Pa’an District, Karen State. According to reports, the mine had been planted on a path leading to Saw Pha Nya Lu’s paddy field.

In December 2008, an FBR team member from Toungoo District in Karen State reported that during 2008 two women and five men had stepped on landmines in Toungoo District alone. The original report, however, failed to elaborate on any of the incidents.

This 18-year-old Karen villager lost the lower portion of his left leg after stepping on an SPDC-deployed landmine on 4 April 2008 as he was attempting to flee from the SPDC army unit attacking his village in northern Papun District of Karen State. This photograph was taken almost three months later as he was recovering from the injury. For more information, see the list of mine victims shown above in the incident that had originally been reported on 22 August 2008. [Photo: © KHRG]
De-Mining Activities

According to the ICBL, there were no official humanitarian mine clearance programs conducted in Burma during 2008 by the SPDC or any other group. However, it was reported that on 29 June 2008, NaSaKa (Burmes Border Security Force) personnel held joint flag meetings in Cox’s Bazaar, Bangladesh with their counterparts from the Bangladeshi Rifles (BDR) to discuss de-mining activities along the border, among other topics. According to reports, both groups had agreed upon the removal of antipersonnel landmines deployed along the Burma-Bangladesh border, although no mine clearance programs were reported to have been initiated in the area since the meeting.70

There were, as in previous years, some reports that certain NSAs opposing the central military regime had on occasion removed landmines planted in ethnic minority areas by SPDC army units. Credible sources have reported that some of these same NSAs have also removed landmines that they have planted if they were not detonated during the ambush for which they had been deployed.71 Such activities, however, cannot be defined as humanitarian “minefield clearance”, in which the mines are permanently removed to protect the civilian population from harm, but rather as military “minefield breaching” where only enough mines are cleared to allow a military unit to safely pass.

On 19 April 2008, Maung Aye, a Karen villager from Takaw Bpwa village in Mone Township of western Karen State was badly wounded after a landmine exploded in his face, sending shrapnel into his face and mangling his hand. While the original report did not state what Maung Aye was doing at the time, the nature of his injuries seem to indicate that he had been attempting to remove or defuse the mine when it exploded in his face. Unfortunately, the original source also failed to specify whether Maung Aye was a civilian or a combatant.72 The same report, published by the Free Burma Rangers (FBR), documented a second case in which an individual was wounded while engaged in de-mining activities. According to the report, on an unspecified date during April 2008, 17-year-old Saw Kyaw Thay was killed as he attempted to remove a landmine from an unspecified location in Toungoo District of Karen State. The blast destroyed his hands and sent shrapnel flying into his face as he had attempted to defuse the mine. Again, it was not stated whether Saw Kyaw Thay was a
civilian or if he was affiliated with an armed opposition group and it remains unknown who was responsible for the initial deployment of the mine.\textsuperscript{73} Although these two incidents (along with the six which follow) were the only cases that HRDU received reports of during 2008, it is quite safe to assume that there were a number of other examples of NSAs removing landmines from areas frequented by civilians, albeit without the disastrous results of these two cases (and thus not reported on).

KNLA soldiers reportedly engaged in de-mining activities in Papun District, Karen State at different times throughout 2008. According to KHRG, KNLA forces had removed a number of domestically-produced M-14 blast mines deployed by SPDC army units in civilian areas in Lu Thaw Township. The two mines shown in the following photograph were unearthed from the vicinity of Kay Pu and Tar Nya Lah Hta villages on 21 January and 13 February 2008 respectively, adding that SPDC army units had laid an unknown number of mines in civilian areas including “along roads, in forests and farm fields; as well as in and around burned out villages”. Other photographs from the same report showed more M-14 mines unearthed from other locations in Lu Thaw Township, including one from Saw Gheh Hta village on 16 May 2008, another from an unidentified hill field on 30 July 2008 and yet another from Htee Bpway Kee village on 5 August. All of these mines had allegedly been deployed by SPDC army units operating in the area.\textsuperscript{74}

Meanwhile, in November 2008, KNLA soldiers defused an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) deployed by DKBA soldiers in Pa’an District. The device consisted of a hand grenade which was attached to a small sapling with elastic bands. A nylon cord was tied to the grenade’s safety pin and stretched across the small trail as a trip wire. The photograph reproduced below shows the IED moments before it was disarmed by KNLA soldiers. In all likelihood, this grenade would have been redeployed by the KNLA against either the SPDC or the DKBA.\textsuperscript{75}

This IED, consisting of a hand grenade attached to a tree and rigged with a tripwire was deployed by DKBA soldiers on a trail frequently used by civilian villagers in Pa’an District, Karen State. Please disregard the incorrect date stamped on the photograph. For more information, see the preceding incident. \[\text{Photo: © KHRG}\]

While the sporadic and typically \textit{ad hoc} de-mining activities of NSAs are insufficient to adequately address the full scale of the problem, much of our knowledge of the mines being deployed by the SPDC and their allied ceasefire armies comes from reports of mines lifted from the ground by armed opposition groups. For example, our awareness of a number of
the newly-identified mines discussed in the preceding section (such the M-26 BFM and the VAR/40 BM) stems from intelligence shared by armed opposition groups.

While numerous armed groups operating on both sides of the conflict in Burma are responsible for the continued deployment of antipersonnel landmines, the HRDU is yet to receive any reliable evidence suggesting that any of these groups systematically map the locations of the mines which they deploy or the locations of areas known to be contaminated by landmines. Some observers, however, have suggested that certain armed groups have on occasion marked the presence of live minefields. The Karen National Union (KNU), for example, has maintained that it has been erecting landmine warning signs across all rural areas of Karen State which they have access to. A representative of the ICBL, however, has stated that despite the claims of the KNU, he has only witnessed two such signs.76 Meanwhile, the photograph reproduced on the front cover of the *Landmine Monitor 2008: Burma/Myanmar*, taken in early 2008, clearly shows a sign placed by the SPDC in Ye Township, Mon State warning local civilians of the presence of landmines in the area. Similarly, the ICBL has maintained that marked and fenced minefields have been seen alongside a number of major roads in Tenasserim (Tanintharyi) Division, along the Kanbauk – Myaing Kalay gas pipeline traversing Karen and Mon States, and around the electricity transmission pylons originating from the Baluchaung hydroelectric power plant in Karenni State.77 Previous editions of the *Burma Human Rights Yearbook* have reported that some armed opposition groups inform local villagers of the locations of mined areas. However, in many of the cases in which this happens the precise locations of the mines are typically withheld from the villagers who are usually only informed of the general area where mines have been laid.78

The widespread use of landmines by numerous different armed actors, the lack of any monitoring or mapping of their placement and the absence of any systematic de-mining programs in Burma collectively lead to a yearly net increase in the number of landmines deployed in Burma. Left *in situ*, landmines will remain an unseen threat to the civilian population for many years until they are either stepped on, accidentally unearthed or (preferably) whenever any serious attempts are made towards conducting a mine clearance program. Regrettably, until such time, civilians will continue to be wounded, maimed and killed as a result.

These four Karen villagers all lost their legs to SPDC-laid landmines in separate incidents. SPDC army units have been deploying antipersonnel landmines across Karen State and other parts of the country in their thousands over the past several years. Many of these mines have been planted in civilian areas and as a result, the vast majority of mine casualties now recorded in Burma involve civilians. [Photo: © KHRG]
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Human Minesweeping

A number of credible reports published by local human rights organizations operating in Burma's areas of ethnic armed conflict have indicated that civilian villagers continued to be used as human minesweepers by SPDC army units and their allied ceasefire groups during 2008. Dubbed "atrocity de-mining" by some groups, the practice of human minesweeping involves forcing civilians to walk in front of military patrols in areas believed to suffer from landmine contamination. In the event that landmines are encountered, the 'expendable' villagers will absorb the blast, while the soldiers follow at a safe distance beyond the blast radius. Civilian villagers are also commonly ordered to serve as human minesweepers to safeguard military vehicles and other machinery such as bulldozers from the risk of landmines. In March 2008, two incidents were reported in which villagers were ordered to walk along a motor road in Toungoo District, Karen State ahead of an SPDC army bulldozer which was being used to maintain the road. (For more information, see the incidents listed below).

In the event that villagers are injured or killed in this manner, the soldiers typically deny all responsibility and refuse to provide any medical care or compensation to the victims or their surviving family members. There have been repeated cases reported where the victim has survived the blast, but was left for dead by the soldiers. On 5 October 2008, for example, there were two separate incidents in which Karen villagers, serving as human minesweepers for DKBA units in Pa'an District, Karen State, had stepped on landmines and were denied medical assistance. Both victims later died as a result. Meanwhile, in June 2008, another Karen villager was injured by a landmine while serving as a porter and human minesweeper for the SPDC in Papun District, Karen State. Following the blast, the unit that he was portering for reportedly took him to their camp for treatment, but this proved to be ineffective and he too died as a result of his injuries. (For more information, see the incidents listed below).

On 22 February 2008, Saw Bpo Heh, 35, from Bpaw Baw Hta village in Dooplaya District of Karen State was killed after stepping on a landmine while acting as a human minesweeper for DKBA soldiers. According to reports, a combined DKBA column comprised of soldiers from DKBA #907 and #999 Battalions lead by Mee Nyaw Thu entered the village and demanded several villagers to "guide" them to a nearby village. The villagers were ordered to walk in front while the soldiers followed at a safe distance behind. It remains unclear which armed group operating in the area was responsible for deploying the mine and thus also for Saw Bpo Heh's death.

On 24 March 2008, 21 villagers from southern Toungoo District were ordered to perform forced labour on the road linking Ma La Daw and Bu Hsa Kee villages. Among this group, a number of villagers were forced to walk in front of the SPDC army bulldozer as human minesweepers lest any mines had been laid on the road by opposition forces. Of the 21 villagers, nine were reportedly from Yu Lo, two were from Ka Mu Lo and a further ten were from Ma La Daw. It remains unclear, however, exactly how many of these villagers were forced to be human minesweepers.

On 30 March 2008, Saw K'Lu Htoo from Maw Ko village in Toungoo District, Karen State was badly wounded after stepping on an SPDC-deployed landmine. According to reports, SPDC army soldiers from Military Operations Command (MOC) #21 had forced him to walk ahead of a bulldozer as a human minesweeper.

On 10 June 2008, an unnamed Karen villager died after stepping on a landmine while serving as a military porter and human minesweeper for the SPDC. According to reports, the villager, from Bu Tho Township in Papun District, Karen State, was among a group of
four villagers forced to porter loads for the SPDC by LIB #343 Battalion Commander Myo Min Aung. According to one of the other villagers present, the victim was taken back to the Gk’Hee Gkyo SPDC army camp for treatment where he died later that same day.84

On 3 October 2008, a number of civilian villagers were forced to serve as human minesweepers by DKBA soldiers operating in Pa’an District, Karen State. According to a report by the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), Maw Lah Wah of DKBA Brigade #999 ordered five villages in T’Moh village tract to each send between three and five villagers to porter supplies for his unit while walking in front of the soldiers lest the KNLA had planted landmines along the trail. Those villages which had received this order included:

1. Htee Bper village;
2. T’Wee Koh village;
3. Toh Gkyeh Gkwee village;
4. Htee Bper Kee village; and
5. Greh Nee village.85

At approximately 2:30 pm on 5 October 2008, Saw Pah Doo, a 48-year-old Karen civilian villager from T’Kreh Ni village, stepped on a landmine while walking in front of a DKBA patrol as a human minesweeper in T’Moh village tract of Pa’an District, Karen State. The DKBA soldiers were reportedly from DKBA #999 Brigade, Battalion #2 (Saw Maung La Wah commanding). The soldiers who had forced him to walk ahead of them refused to accept responsibility and thus also refused to provide him with medical care. He later died as a result.86

Also on 5 October 2008, 62-year-old Saw Ngah Gkyar from Pah Khay Gkwee village stepped on a landmine near Htee Per Kee village at approximately 8:30 pm while being forced to serve as a human minesweeper for DKBA troops in Pa’an District. A separate report by the Centre for Internally Displaced Karen Persons (CIDKP) maintained that he had been forced to be a minesweeper by a DKBA officer by the name of Bo Young Ni, although failed to mention which unit Young Ni was attached to. After he had stepped on the landmine, the DKBA did not provide him with any medical attention, nor evacuate him to a medical clinic for treatment. He later died from the injuries that he had sustained in the blast.87

In her 16 November 2007 report to the UN Secretary General on the use of child soldiers in Burma, the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Radhika Coomaraswamy had alleged that the SPDC-allied the Karenni National People’s Liberation Front (KNPLF) had used some of the many child soldiers within its ranks to “search for landmines” which had been deployed “other armed groups.”88
Mine Risk Education

As in previous years, there were no official Mine Risk Education (MRE) programs conducted by the SPDC in Burma during 2008. The ICBL stated in its Landmine Monitor report that "[d]espite a large mine problem and significant mine/ERW [explosive remnants of war] casualties, mine/ERW risk education ... is either non-existent or inadequate in areas with reported casualties".89

The few MRE programs which were run in Burma and in refugee camps in neighbouring countries were conducted on an ad hoc basis by Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), and certain NSA groups. For example, in December 2008, the Centre for Internally Displaced Karen Persons (CIDKP) reported that they were working with other CBOs in the implementation of its MRE programs. According to reports, the CIDKP MRE teams worked with the Karenni Social Welfare and Development Committee (KSWDC) in Karenni State throughout 2008. They also reported that they had been working with the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW) and the Backpack Health Worker Teams (BPHWT) in Tenasserim Division. The report further maintained that the CIDKP operated 16 MRE teams in four different states in Burma. While the report failed to elucidate exactly which four states these were, it is probable that they would include Karen, Karenni and Mon States, along with Tenasserim Division.90 MRE team member Saw Lah Soe, stated that inter-organizational collaboration of this sort has proven to be very effective, and that as a result, attendance to their MRE programs has increased by up to 60 percent over the past year, although no further statistics were provided.91 Danish consultant to the CIDKP MRE program, Bee Jay, added that "Mine Risk Education is one of the methods being used to reduce both kinds of accidents [mine casualties as a result of mines deployed by both the SPDC and the KNLA]. ... They definitely save lives and limbs with their voluntary education programs in their home areas. Without these efforts, the statistics would look even grimmer".92

Meanwhile, KNU General Secretary, Naw Zipporah Sein has claimed that the KNU also implements its own MRE programs among local communities in parts of Karen State that the KNU is able to access: "We run education programs to warn villagers of the risks and our soldiers de-mine areas where the Burmese army have planted mines and booby traps".93 However, despite these claims of the KNU, villagers continued to be wounded by landmines which had been deployed by KNLA soldiers in areas known to be frequented by civilians. For further details, see the incident and accompanying photograph from May 2008 shown above.

Previously unreleased information collected by the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) in 2005 indicated that only a small percentage of internally displaced villagers living in landmine contaminated parts of eastern Burma had stated that they had ever seen landmine warning signs erected by the SPDC or NSAs. Awareness of the presence of landmines was said to be passed among community members verbally or whenever a casualty occurred. In parts of Karen State, armed opposition groups were reported to be one of the main sources of information on the location of mined areas, while further north in Karenni State, SPDC army units were attributed with passing on the majority of these verbal warnings.94 (For more information on the marking of minefields, see “De-mining Activities” above).

As in previous years, MRE programs continued to be conducted in the numerous refugee camps located along the Thai-Burma border. Such programs are implemented by various different NGOs, including the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) and Handicap International (HI).
Victim Assistance

With an annual budgetary allocation the equivalent of only 0.3 percent of the nation’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Burma’s healthcare sector remains the lowest funded in the world. This appallingly low level of funding equates to an average annual expenditure of only US$0.70 on healthcare per capita. (For more information, see Chapter 11: Right to Health). When faced with these damning statistics, it is hardly surprising that the level of survivor assistant afforded to landmine victims in Burma remains woefully inadequate.

Contrary to the claims of the SPDC, precious little assistance is provided to those who fall victim to landmines in Burma. The small amount of assistance which is offered is generally reserved for members of the armed forces; while civilian mine victims are typically left to fend for themselves. The SPDC characteristically denies all responsibility for civilian landmine victims despite the fact that the vast majority of landmines which now contaminate the country were deployed by SPDC army units and that those same units continue to force villagers against their will into areas known to be contaminated by landmines as forced labourers and human minesweepers. Whenever a civilian is injured or killed in a mine accident, SPDC army units usually absolve themselves of all liability by blaming armed opposition groups for having laid the mine and advise the victim and their family to turn to them in search of accountability and compensation. Not only do SPDC army units typically deny all responsibility for civilians injured while performing services for the military, but mine victims are often left for dead where they lay.

Those occasions in which SPDC army units provide civilians with medical care are few and far between. For example, the HRDU only received one report from 2008 in which an SPDC army unit provided medical care to a civilian who had been wounded by a landmine while forced to serve as a military porter in frontline areas of Karen State. However, even in this rare case, that which was provided was inadequate and the victim died later that same day as a result of his injuries (For more information, see the incident dated 10 June 2008 in the preceding section dealing with “Human Minesweeping”).

[Photo: © KHRG]
Civilian landmine victims must rely primarily on emergency assistance from medics affiliated with armed opposition groups and local independent aid organizations that travel into conflict areas with backpacks full of medical supplies. The Backpack Health Worker Teams (BPHWT), the Free Burma Rangers (FBR), and the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW) are three such groups identified as travelling into contested regions of eastern Burma to provide medical services, including emergency care for landmine victims.97 A spokesperson for the KDHW stated in an interview in March 2008 that the KDHW ran 33 mobile clinics in different parts of Karen State, serving an estimated 106,000 patients.98 Meanwhile, in January 2009, FBR representatives stated that they had 48 active relief teams operating in five different states in Burma (including Karen, Karenni, Shan and Arakan States and Tenasserim Division).99 While such groups do all they can to help mine victims, their resources are limited, as are the areas to which they can access mine victims, and unfortunately, the demand remains much greater than that which they are able to supply.

A number of international organizations working inside the country through official channels have also continued to provide victim assistance to landmine survivors; however, their capacity to do so was limited during 2008. In May 2008, it was reported that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had discontinued a number of its programs over the past year. According to the report, the ICRC withdrew support from three physical rehabilitation centres administered by the SPDC Ministry of Health and a further three managed by the Ministry of Defence. The assistance was reportedly suspended in June 2007 as a result of restrictions imposed by the SPDC which prevented the ICRC from “discharging its mandate in accordance with its standard working procedures”.100 According to a second report released by the ICRC in May 2008, the only rehabilitation program which continued to be supported by the ICRC was the Orthopaedic Rehabilitation Centre in Pa’an, Karen State. In December 2008, Djordje Drndarski, the deputy head of the ICRC delegation in Rangoon, maintained that the ICRC continued to “treat 600 people a year [and that] Most of those being helped with our prosthetic services are adults”.101 In response to the reduction in ICRC services and activities, the Myanmar Red Cross (MRC), which works in partnership with the ICRC on many of its programs inside the country, limited its outreach work to areas in the close vicinity of Pa’an. Moreover, the Myanmar Red Cross reportedly stopped referring landmine victims to SPDC-run hospitals and clinics. According to the ICBL, as a result of the reduction of assistance provided by the ICRC, “access to services became difficult for persons with disabilities”.102 Support for the ICRC War Wounded Program (in which the ICRC meets the medical costs of individuals injured by landmines and other weapons in Burma) was also pulled in mid-2007, owing to the ICRC’s stated inability to “monitor the activity” of the program. The program, however, reportedly continued to provide medical care and services to mine victims from Burma who are able to cross the border into Thailand.103

Mine victims from Burma have been able to seek medical treatment from various public hospitals and refugee camp clinics in a number of Thailand’s border provinces, including Tak, Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Son, Kanchanaburi and Ratchaburi.104 According to the Landmine Monitor 2008, the Mae Sot General Hospital in Tak Province provided emergency medical care to 63 mine survivors during the reporting period, while the Srisungval Hospital in Mae Hong Son Province cared for a further four. The Mae Tao Clinic (MTC) located on the outskirts of Mae Sot also continued to provide emergency care to mine victims throughout 2008, although little information has been made available regarding the number of patients treated during 2008.105 The MTC also continued to provide physical rehabilitation and prosthetic services to its patients throughout 2008. In December 2008, a staff member from the MTC prosthetic department stated that each month “the clinic registers an average of about 20 prosthetic leg [fittings]”.106 Clear Path International (CPI), the Karen Handicap Welfare Association
(KHWA), the Shan Health Committee (SHC), and Care Villa in the Mae La refugee camp in Tak Province, Thailand were also said to have provided assistance to mine survivors throughout 2008.107

In December 2008, it was reported that a new initiative was underway to construct a prosthetic clinic deep in the forests of northern Karen State. According to reports, the clinic is said to utilize a combination of women’s stockings, beach sand, a pizza oven and a vacuum pump in the manufacture of tailor-made prosthetic limbs through a process known as CIR prosthetic casting. The process utilizes reusable materials such as sand, rather than the traditional plaster, and can provide amputees with new limbs in a single visit within a matter of hours. The CIR process, named after the Chicago-based Centre for International Rehabilitation (CIR) who developed it, takes an impression of the victim’s stump in sand, and uses this mould to cast a prosthesis custom fit the victim’s stump. To make the cast, the amputee first places their stump into a bag of fine sand to form an impression of it. All of the air is then sucked out of the bag using the vacuum pump, leaving the sand as hard as a rock. From the negative mould made in the sand, a positive mould is made. The positive mould (which is a precise copy of the amputee's stump) can then be “modified to create pressure reliefs or pressure bearing areas within the socket”. Finally, the pizza oven is used to soften the polypropylene which is then poured into the mould to create the tailor-made socket for the prosthesis. The system has reportedly already been used in different parts of the developing world with great success, including parts of Africa and Latin America, as well as in India and Vietnam. The clinic is the first of its kind for Burma and, according to some sources, is “more advanced than any other NGO prosthetic workshop in and around Burma”. Providing the success of this first clinic in northern Karen State, further clinics are slated for construction, including a second in southern Karen State.108

An undated photograph of a transfemoral (above the knee) landmine victim from Karenni State. The SPDC typically denies all responsibility for the civilian victims of its mines. Little to no assistance is ever provided by the SPDC and mine survivors such as the man shown in this photograph are required to obtain emergency care and physical rehabilitation services from independent aid organizations or opposition groups. [Photo: © Yeni/Irrawaddy]

While Burmese domestic law stipulates that civilians who suffer permanent disabilities are entitled to a tax-free stipend from the State, there is no evidence to suggest that any mine victims received any sort of financial assistance from the SPDC during 2008. Meanwhile, military personnel who suffer mine injuries are supposed to be provided with employment within the civil service with a salary at the equivalent to that which they were earning while in military service.109 In practice, however, such benefits are rarely distributed equitably with such positions typically only being offered to officers, while enlisted soldiers are discharged.
with no pension or compensation and are left to fend for themselves. An unnamed sergeant from Light Infantry Division (LID) #88 has claimed that, “If a rank-and-file soldier gets injured, he is no longer considered fit to serve his country”. On the contrary, an officer will typically be offered a position within the military bureaucracy or civil service where he can retain the privileges associated with his rank.

Forcing even greater economic hardship onto disabled enlisted soldiers, in late 2007, the SPDC Ministry of Defence overturned a former policy which previously allowed disabled SPDC army personnel to live in military housing compounds after they were no longer able to perform active duty. One unnamed officer attached to LIB #702 based in Hmaubbi Township in Rangoon Division stated that, “Before they could stay as long as they wanted … but now the commanding officers don’t want them to stay and expel them from the compounds”.

An article published in the *Irrawaddy* news magazine maintained that the Ministry of Social Welfare provided veteran mine victims with a State-sponsored vocational training program throughout 2008. According to the article, disabled soldiers were able to learn “practical subjects” such as photography, hairdressing, electronic repair, garment dying and sewing at one of three training facilities located in Pyinbongyi in Pegu (Bago) Division, as well as in two other unspecified locations in Pegu Township in Pegu Division and Kyaukse Township in Mandalay Division. An SPDC army sergeant affiliated with one of the schools has asserted that “Every physically disabled person who was injured in fighting against insurgents can attend the school. However, the schools can’t accept all applicants, because two of the schools do not have enough accommodation or trainers”. Unfortunately, no further information has been made available on the training centres, their programs or the number of mine victims that they are able to provide for.

Meanwhile, in November 2008, it was reported that the Japanese Association for Aid and Relief (JAAR) had provided 11 mine survivors with vocational training during 2007, although, it was not clarified what these trainings entailed, nor what services had been provided during 2008.
4.3 Unexploded Ordinance and Explosive Remnants of War

Very little information exists regarding the amount of Unexploded Ordinance (UXO) and Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) in Burma. Though the extent of the problem remains unknown, certain areas of Burma, particularly those in the eastern parts of the country adjacent to the Burma-Thailand border which have suffered from extensive armed conflict, are known to be contaminated by a considerable quantity of UXO. The “Dangerous Areas Survey” conducted by the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen Persons (CIDKP) and the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW) in contested regions of Karen State in 2006 has reportedly recognized numerous areas where UXO has been identified as a problem.\(^{114}\) However, the findings of this survey have not been made publicly available and the number of areas in which UXO has been found and the locations of these areas remain unknown.

Unexploded Ordinance (UXO) and Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) are typically defined as explosive ordinance which did not explode on impact and thus remain active and dangerous for civilian populations living in the area. While cluster munitions are arguably one of the most pervasive forms of UXO globally, the HRDU is not aware of there ever having been any reported cases of individuals being wounded or killed by these devices in Burma. The more common UXO found in Burma include defective mortars, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), and rifle grenades which have been fired either during armed conflict or directly on undefended civilian villages. The majority of the cases which have been recorded in previous years have involved mortar rounds or RPGs which had been fired on civilian villages and IDP hiding sites and had failed to explode, but had been later accidentally detonated by civilian villagers.

This defective 60 mm mortar shell was fired by SPDC army soldiers at an unspecified civilian village in Papun District, Karen State on an unspecified date in early 2008. Luckily for the villagers, the shell had failed to explode on impact. [Photo: © KHRG]

It has been speculated that a considerable proportion of SPDC ordinance is defective and fails to explode on impact. A representative of the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) has informed the HRDU, based on personal experience and the expertise of FBR relief team members, that “at least 10% [of the] ordinance used by [the] SPDC are duds,” while the percentage of defective SPDC-manufactured ordinance is “more like 15%, and in the case of mortar rounds up to 20%.”\(^{115}\)
While the number of casualties caused by UXO in Burma each year is unknown, what little evidence is available suggests that the number of incidents arising from contact with UXO is considerably lower than those associated with antipersonnel landmines and IEDs, and though the picture is far from complete, various local organizations continued to record incidents involving UXO throughout 2008. The Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), for example, published numerous photographs of defective mortars and RPGs which SPDC army soldiers had fired upon civilian villages throughout the year.

This unexploded Chinese-made Type 69 RPG round was fired at Htee Ber Kee village in Pa’an District, Karen State by DKBA soldiers in October 2008 after the villagers had failed to relocate to a nearby DKBA-garrisoned village as ordered. According to the KHRG, following the forced relocation orders, two to three similar RPGs were fired at the village each day for a week in an inept attempt to dissuade the villagers to move under direct DKBA control. Please disregard the incorrect date stamped onto the photograph. [Photo: © KHRG]
4.4 A Year of Living Dangerously - Explosions on the streets

Bomb Blasts

The year 2008 brought a spate of inexplicable bomb blasts to the streets of Rangoon and other parts of the country. During 2008, there were 22 separate explosions reported, in which at least nine people were killed and a further 15 were injured. Reports carried by SPDC mouthpiece, the *New Light of Myanmar* have alleged that a further six devices were discovered and defused by security personnel at the time of and close to the scenes of a number of these incidents.

In almost every reported case, the SPDC was quick to level blame for the explosions on “terrorist insurgent” groups; a common euphemism for opposition groups such as the KNU, SSA-S, ABSDF, and others, and many news reports on the explosions have seemingly accepted this assessment as a plausible explanation. However, the HRDU is not so easily convinced.

It is quite doubtful that an opposition group such as the KNU was responsible for these blasts, as has been repeatedly alleged by the SPDC. At the time of publication, the KNU had been actively opposing the regime for 60 years in what has become the world’s longest continuous armed insurgency. Throughout the entire duration of their insurgency, the KNU has been confronted by a far larger and better equipped combative force. The very fact that the KNU continues to oppose the junta six decades later is testament to the skill of its soldiers and their adaptability to changing circumstances. It is therefore highly unlikely that an armed group with sixty years combat experience would commit their limited resources to inept attempts at blowing up infrastructure which possess absolutely no military or strategic significance. Furthermore, the HRDU finds it equally implausible that such an experienced and obviously skilled fighting force would consistently fail to destroy their targets. In apparent agreement, Thailand-based Burmese military analyst Htay Aung has asked, “If any group [armed insurgents] wants to explode bombs, why would they want to do it in toilets and in dustbins? They would directly place their bombs near their target.”

Similarly, in the vast majority of cases, the explosions have been small, have caused minimal damage to infrastructure, and the only reported deaths have been among the civilian population. These attacks hardly sound like the tactics that an experienced and combat-proven insurgent force would employ.

Furthermore, for a number of the cases detailed below, it was reported that security officials, soldiers, and police officers had arrived on the scene remarkably quickly following the initial blast. For instance, one Rangoon resident reported that as many as 7,000 police officers had suddenly appeared on Rangoon’s streets within minutes of an explosion that had occurred at a busy Rangoon bus stop in September 2008 on the eve of the one year anniversary of the crackdown on the Saffron Revolution protests, suggesting that the authorities were either readied at a superhuman state of alertness or that they had prior knowledge of the explosion. (For more information on the Saffron Revolution protests, see the HRDU report *Bullets in the Alms Bowl: An analysis of the brutal SPDC suppression of the Saffron Revolution*). Meanwhile, eyewitnesses have testified that it took the authorities five hours to arrive on the scene after the compressed natural gas (CNG) tank on one of Rangoon’s public buses had unexpectedly exploded in the early morning of 13 October 2008. The bodies of the seven commuters killed in the blast lay strewn across the road for the five hours that it took the police to arrive (For more information, see the following section on “Bus Explosions”).
In addition to the improbable speed at which security personnel have supposedly responded to these bomb blasts, in a number of incidences, they have also reportedly discovered and defused additional devices before they too could be detonated. According to reports, a number of these secondary devices had been well hidden, and their miraculous discovery in some highly obscure locations raises questions regarding how the authorities knew to look there. For example, following the explosion at the No. 45 bus stop in Rangoon on 25 September 2008 briefly described above, a second bomb was allegedly found inside an innocuous-looking cassette recorder nearby.\(^{119}\)

However, despite the claims of the SPDC, the HRDU believes that a far more plausible explanation would be that it is the SPDC themselves who are planting and detonating these bombs. Though few reports are arriving at this conclusion, it would appear that the HRDU is not alone in holding this belief. Following the two explosions in Rangoon on 20 April 2008, one unnamed male Rangoon resident ventured that:

“We even wonder if the bomb last weekend was planted by the authorities to blame those who are against them. ... Whenever a bomb explodes, no responsible person is found or brought to justice. But they will arrest a man from an opposition party and force him to admit that he planted the bomb”.\(^ {120}\)

Similarly, writing in response to the arrest of well-known activist Myint Aye following the explosion outside the Shwepyitha Township Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA) office in Rangoon on 1 July 2008, an unnamed member of the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), publishing under the pseudonym Azwar Thi stated, “While supposed bombers are locked up, bombs keep going off. ... For years the authorities have responded to bombings not through credible inquiries or arrests of genuine suspects but through the same sort of finger pointing and jailing of troublemakers”\(^ {121}\).

Meanwhile, certain commentators have alleged that the SPDC is using the bomb blasts to instil a sense of nationalist fervour among its cadres to unite the military under one banner. Win Min, a Burmese analyst based in Thailand has argued that, “If the military feels that there is an enemy, it is easier to unite. So, it might be possible that the junta wants to inculcate this sense by declaring the KNU as a common enemy of the military”.\(^ {122}\)

While this explanation is certainly possible, the HRDU agrees with the first theory proffered and believes that it is more likely that the SPDC has been deploying these devices in an attempt to discredit those groups which continue to oppose them in addition to validating their own existence. If this is true, this would not be the first time that the regime has turned to employing this strategy. For example, on 25 August 1988, in the aftermath of the 1988 pro-democracy demonstrations and subsequent massacre; approximately 9,000 violent criminals were released from prisons across the country with no provision of food or money. Violent crime and looting quickly escalated across the county which the military then used to justify its continued rule.\(^ {123}\) Similarly, on 30 May 2003, members of the SPDC-sponsored USDA and other State-organized individuals ambushed and attacked Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s motorcade with bamboo sticks and metal rods on the outskirts of Depayin in Sagaing Division, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 70 persons. NLD Deputy Chairman U Tin Oo, and all members of the NLD Central Executive Committee were arrested and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was placed back under house arrest “for her own safety.”\(^ {124}\) More recently, during the September 2007 ‘Saffron Revolution’ protests, numerous reports had claimed that the SPDC had infiltrated members of the USDA and Swan Arr Shin (“masters of physical force”) among the protestors, many of them dressed as monks, whose job it was to incite violence and “taunt the security forces” so that the SPDC could be justified in its violent suppression of the demonstrations.\(^ {125}\)

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\(^{119}\) Following the explosion at the No. 45 bus stop in Rangoon on 25 September 2008.

\(^{120}\) As quoted in Human Rights and Development Unit (HRDU), 2008.

\(^{121}\) As quoted in Asia Times Online, 2008.

\(^{122}\) As quoted in Asia Times Online, 2008.

\(^{123}\) As quoted in HRDU, 2008.

\(^{124}\) As quoted in HRDU, 2008.

\(^{125}\) As quoted in HRDU, 2008.
The following is a chronology of reported bomb blasts that occurred throughout Burma during 2008.

At approximately 4:00 am on 11 January 2008, one unnamed 40-year-old woman was killed in the first bomb attack to have occurred in Naypyidaw since the SPDC established the site as their new capital in November 2005. According to reports, the bomb had been planted in a toilet at the Naypyidaw railway station, although no further information was given. Later reports maintained that the SPDC had accused the victim of being responsible for having planted the bomb on behalf of the KNU. Reports carried in the New Light of Myanmar have typically levelled blame at dissident groups opposing the regime with little to no evidence to support such claims. Such allegations are characteristically vague and often do not name the organization which they are referring to: “Terrorist saboteurs have been sent into the nation across the border together with explosives to perpetrate destructive acts under the scheme of a group from abroad”.126

On 13 January 2008, a 73-year-old woman was injured when a bomb exploded at the intersection of Sule Pagoda Road and Bogyoke Aung San Road in Rangoon. According to an unnamed official at the Rangoon central railway station, “At around 2:30 pm, a bomb exploded at the advance ticket counter across the road from the railway station”.127

On 16 January 2008, a bomb exploded aboard a passenger bus travelling between Kyaukkyi in Pegu Division and Rangoon, killing the driver. According to reports, which drew their information from an article published in the SPDC-controlled New Light of Myanmar, the explosion ripped through the bus, killing 35-year-old Lwin Soe as the bus had pulled over to a roadside restaurant in Pyinpongyi village in Pegu Township, Pegu Division at approximately 8:45 am. As per usual, the SPDC pointed an accusatory finger at unnamed insurgent groups, to which KNU spokesperson, Saw Hla Nye, countered by alleging that, “The military regime is engineering the blasts themselves for diverting attention of the people from their evil doings”.128

On 30 January 2008, Major Saw Leh Mu of the SPDC-allied Karen National Union / Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council (KNU/KNLA PC) was killed in an explosion which was believed to have been a targeted assassination. Leh Mu was the son-in-law of KNU/KNLA PC commander, Brigadier General Htain Maung. A spokesperson for the DKBA reported that, “We don't know how powerful the explosion was, but someone who saw the bomb scene said that his body was blown into small pieces”.129

On 6 February 2008, it was reported that police officers and intelligence officials had been conducting searches of cinema-goers in Rangoon, presumably in response to the spate of bombings which wracked Rangoon during January. According to one movie-goer, all bags were searched for explosives and no one was permitted to leave the cinema before the end of the film: “If someone wants to leave the cinema before the movie finishes, they have to have their fingerprints taken by security officials”. No bombs were reported as having been found during any of the searches. Another movie-goer expressed the sentiment felt by most of those who were subjected to the searches when he said, “I don't like the way they treat us like criminals with their serious faces while they search us. I come to the cinema for recreation, not to stage a revolution”.130

On 9 February 2008, a bomb hidden in a garbage bin exploded near the approaches to Sitkhine Pawndawgyi Bridge in Sittwe, Arakan State. The blast reportedly damaged three military vehicles parked nearby, although no human casualties were reported. Reports have alleged that the bomb had been deployed by local inter-city bus drivers, disgruntled over fuel rationing and who had been engaged in disputes with police officers and fuel merchants the night before. The HRDU believes that while this theory is possible, it is somewhat unlikely.131
At approximately 3:00 am on 18 February 2008, four small bombs exploded at the Golden Triangle Paradise Resort Hotel in Tachilek, Shan State. Reports maintained that there were no casualties and only minor damage was done to the hotel. According to reports, the four bombs were detonated in seemingly random locations in and around the hotel, including: near a tea shop within the hotel compound, in the staff living quarters, and two more in the grounds of the hotel. One hotel employee stated on condition of anonymity that “the blasts did not appear to be dangerous but were rather meant to scare guests and employees”. Later that same morning, an estimated 70 Thai guests all checked out of the hotel. The series of explosions came only days after SPDC-controlled media had warned of imminent bomb blasts carried out by “destructionists” intent on causing public panic. While some local residents believed that the bombs had been planted by rival businessmen, the SPDC was quick to lay blame for the explosions on the opposition Shan State Army – South (SSA-S). An unnamed employee of the hotel added that:

“For now, no one is sure which group placed the bombs, but the SPDC has blamed the Shan State Army [South] (SSA). But the hotel is in the [area] controlled by the Burma Army soldiers and also the place is close to the border police station and immigration department. We have never seen the Shan soldiers or any rebel soldiers here before.”

SPDC army soldiers stationed in front of Rangoon City Hall. In September 2008, thousands of SPDC army soldiers, police and other security personnel were rapidly deployed on Rangoon’s streets immediately following an explosion near the popular Maha Bandoola Park. Security personnel reportedly conducted thorough searches of all public buses and taxis, recording the names, addresses, ID numbers and the purpose of visit of every passenger. It has been speculated that the SPDC had deployed the bomb themselves to justify their heavy security presence throughout Rangoon on the eve of the one year anniversary of the crackdown of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution protests, and that the checks on the passengers had been conducted not in search of further explosives but to locate any potential dissidents. [Photo: © Mizzima News / IHT]

At approximately 12:30 am on 12 April 2008, a bomb exploded in Wanpang village of Laikha Township, Shan State, reportedly injuring five people. While the New Light of Myanmar maintained that a member of the opposition SSA-S had thrown a hand grenade into the crowd as they were making preparations for the Thingyan water festival, local sources have disagreed, stating that “No one threw a hand grenade … it was an old homemade bomb that exploded because of the heat”. While Wanpang village is located in an area controlled by the SSA-S splinter faction colloquially referred to as Mongzeun’s Group, Major Lao Hseng, a
spokesperson for the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) has asserted that, "It is not our policy to kill innocent people. The SPDC is accusing us to get more support from people for the upcoming referendum. They are twisting facts to mislead the people". According to reports, those injured included:

1. U Nyan Aung;
2. U Pai Aung Kham;
3. U Myint Thein;
4. U Own Pe; and
5. Nang Tin.

On 20 April 2008, two separate explosions occurred in downtown Rangoon near the Traders Hotel and Rangoon City Hall. Both explosions were small in scale and neither caused any injuries. The English-language SPDC mouthpiece, the New Light of Myanmar, reported that a 30-year-old man named Mone Dine, allegedly affiliated with the Vigorous Burma Student Warriors (VBSW; perhaps best known for their seizure of the Burmese embassy in Bangkok in 1999), was responsible for planting the bombs. The article was accompanied by a photograph which was said to be a security camera image depicting the suspect carrying explosives behind the Traders Hotel where one of the blasts had occurred. It was later reported on 8 September 2008, that the VBSW had accepted responsibility for having planted the bombs.

At approximately 6:00 am on 1 July 2008, a bomb was detonated outside the local Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA) office in Shwepyitha Township, Rangoon. No one was injured in the blast as all persons present in the building on the day suspiciously went out "on the street to see a car accident which took place in front of the office about five minutes before the bomb exploded". No casualties were reported. That evening, 62-year-old executive member of the Shwepyitha Township branch of the National League for Democracy (NLD), Khin Maung, was arrested in relation to the incident. The following day, on 2 July, the Vigorous Burma Student Warriors (VBSW) claimed responsibility for the attack, stating that it was a warning to the USDA to "stop acting as the junta's puppet organization". In spite of this, three more NLD members were later arrested and tried over their suspected involvement in the blast. According to reports, those arrested included NLD members Yan Shwe and Zaw Zaw Aung and Myint Aye of the Human Rights Defenders and Promoters (HRDP) network. Both their families and lawyers have professed their innocence.

Masked members of the VBSW, who claimed responsibility for four separate bombs detonated in Burma during 2008. [Photo: © Mizzima News]
On 14 July 2008, a bomb exploded on a passenger bus in Daik U Township, Pegu Division, killing one and injuring another. U Khant, 55, from Kyauktada Township, Rangoon Division was killed when the bomb exploded in the rear of the bus. Meanwhile, 46-year-old Parpar was also wounded in the blast and taken to hospital for treatment. Local residents disagreed with the official version of events and have maintained that at least five people were severely injured and that “the number of casualties could be higher”. State-controlled media blamed the blast on “insurgents resorting to various destructive acts with intent to jeopardize the stability of the state, community peace and tranquility [Sic.] by causing casualties and panic among the innocent people”. This characteristically ambiguous reference is often used when referring to the KNU, whose soldiers are able to operate not far from the site of the explosion and who are also typically the first to be blamed for such acts.136

At approximately 11:30 pm on 30 July 2008, a small bomb exploded in a telecommunications office on the outskirts of Mudon, Mon State. Authorities who investigated the site in the aftermath of the explosion reportedly found four more explosive devices in the vicinity.137

On 6 September 2008, and according to a report carried in the Chinese News Agency, Xinhua, one man was injured when a bomb exploded in Mebaung village in Pa’an District, Karen State. According to what little information could be gathered from the original report, the bomb was detonated on the Pa’an – Hlaingbwe motor road and had succeeded in destroying a “50-KVA hydropower generator” located in Mebaung village. No further information regarding the incident has been made available.138

On 7 September 2008, SPDC Police Chief, Brigadier General Khin Yi held a rare press conference in relation to the 1 July bombing of the Shwepyitha USDA office in Rangoon (see incident listed above). In the uncommon exchange, Khin Yi confirmed that a number of activists, including Yan Shwe and Zaw Zaw Aung and Myint Aye, had been arrested for their alleged involvement in the blast, adding that all three were arrested while in possession of explosives. He went on to add that Myint Aye, who is a well known labour rights activist, had “confessed that he offered cash awards to those who committed terrorist acts in Rangoon”.139 Khin Yi then listed these cash rewards in detail:

“Myint Aye’s cash awards differed depending on the location of the blast, with 10 million kyat awarded for bombing City Hall, 7 million for the city center [Sic.], 5 million for government offices, 2 million for township peace and development council offices, 1.5 million for township USDA offices and the Rangoon Railway Station, 1 million for traffic lights, 0.5 million for junctions and crossroads and 0.2 million for less prominent locations”.140

No evidence to support these claims was presented during the press conference or since. Moreover, these arrests and alleged ‘confessions’ took place after another group, the VBSW, known for having committed similar acts in the past, admitted responsibility for the blast. As such, all of the allegations made by Khin Yi remain highly dubious.141

At approximately 10:40 am on 25 September 2008, a number of commuters were injured by a bomb blast that occurred in the popular Maha Bandoola Park in Kyauktada Township, Rangoon. According to reports, the bomb had been planted in a garbage bin behind the No. 45 bus stop, although there is some disagreement over how many people were injured with some reports maintaining that only three were hurt, while other reports claim that as many as seven were injured. A report carried by the SPDC mouthpiece, the New Light of Myanmar, alleged that a second device was discovered hidden within a cassette recorder and quickly defused. The report, however, failed to state where the cassette recorder was found or how the authorities knew to inspect it. Security throughout Rangoon was tightened immediately following the blast with members of the police force, military intelligence, USDA and auxiliary
fire brigades conducting checks of bus passengers. According to one commuter, “They checked every passenger on board buses, taxis and city buses asking for their name, address, ID number, purpose of visit and place of departure among other details. They also noted down the license plate numbers of the vehicles”. One report maintained that more than 7,000 police officers had been deployed throughout Rangoon immediately following the blast. Meanwhile, public servants were sent home early and a number of shops were ordered to close. The passport office was also reportedly closed. According to an article carried by the *Irrawaddy*, one unidentified foreign diplomat, noting the significant timing of the blast, had speculated that the devices may have been planted by the military to justify the heavy security presence and its “security clampdown in anticipation of an anti-government demonstration” which was expected for the following day on the one year anniversary of the crackdown on the September 2007 Saffron Revolution protests.142

On 25 September 2008, a bomb exploded in a garbage bin behind this bus stop near Maha Bandoola Park in Rangoon, injuring a number of commuters. Though there has been some disagreement over how many people were injured, there have been no reports of any fatalities from the blast. While it is not known conclusively who was responsible, there has been some speculation that the device had been deployed by the military. (For more information, see the preceding incident dated 25 September 2008. [Photo: © Mizzima News]

On 29 September 2008, nine further NLD Youth members were arrested and interrogated over the bomb blast at the USDA office in Rangoon on 1 July 2008, despite the fact that the VBSW had already accepted responsibility for the attack. While three were released later that same day, the other six not only remain unaccounted for, but also unidentified. No further information has been made available.143

At approximately 3:00 am on 18 October 2008, a bomb was detonated at the Tachilek police station in Shan State. No one was reported as having been injured in the blast. A local police officer stated that “A [ethnic] Wa detainee who is being held under a drug charge is suspected in the explosion, and a policeman in the township is being questioned in connection with the bombing”. No further information has emerged regarding this particular bombing.144

Also on 18 October 2008, another bomb exploded around 7:30 pm at a football field in Yankin Township, Rangoon Division. The blast, which reportedly occurred near the intersection of Baukhtaw Railway Station and Moekaung Streets, caused minor damage, but had resulted in no casualties. Police reported discovering and defusing a second device nearby. Little other information concerning this incident has been made available.145
On 20 October 2008, the *Irrawaddy* news magazine reported that on an unspecified date in mid-September 2008, one bomb was detonated at the Tamwe Township police station in Rangoon while another had occurred near Rangoon City Hall. No details were provided of these incidents, and no other source has reported either explosion.146

On 21 October 2008, it was reported that a man was killed in his home in Shwepyitha Township in Rangoon on 19 October when the bomb he was making blew up unexpectedly. According to a report from the *New Light of Myanmar*, the victim, U Thet Oo Win, was a former Buddhist monk who had participated in the September 2007 Saffron Revolution protests but had since left the Sangha, “fled illegally across the border” to Thailand and become a heavy drinker. The mention of this information in the original report appears to be little more than an attempt on the SPDC’s part to discredit not only U Thet Oo Win, but also everyone else who had participated in the protests along with the movement itself. The report also maintained that he was a suspect in the 25 September bomb blast in Kyauktada Township (see incident listed above), based on the report that the authorities had “seized wires, batteries and detonators” from his home which resembled those used in the bus stop bombing. This too would appear to be an inept attempt to further discredit him, as, by the timeline provided in the report, U Thet Oo Win did not even return to Burma until 11 October, more than two weeks after the attack. In the days following Thet Oo Win’s death, an email, alleged to have been published by the VBSW, was circulated confessing that he was “one among many of its members who pledged to fight violently against the oppressed rule of the military dictators”. It was stated in an article published by the *Mizzima News* that “some commentators question the validity of such confessions by the VBSW, who are not only unable to be contacted for comment but also cannot be independently verified to exist”.147

On 24 October 2008, 41-year-old Tin Myint was arrested by the authorities after he had allegedly threatened to blow up the Pabedan Township USDA office and police station in Rangoon. Little other information was given in the original report, published in the *New Light of Myanmar*.148
Bus Explosions

In addition to the bomb blasts across Burma, there have been a number of explosions which have occurred on Rangoon’s public buses as a result of exploding compressed natural gas (CNG) tanks.

Since 2005, the SPDC has taken steps to convert all public transport vehicles operating in Burma so that they run on CNG rather than petrol (gasoline) or diesel. Some sources have speculated that the SPDC’s insistence on the expensive vehicle conversions, estimated to cost approximately one million kyat per vehicle, had more to do with making money for the regime and its associates and less to do with protecting the environment as the junta has maintained. One source has alleged that the vehicle transformations were carried out by IGE Co Ltd, an SPDC-affiliated company headed by Nay Aung and Pyi Aung, the sons of Minister of Industry-1 Colonel Aung Thaung. IGE Co Ltd is also said to have been awarded the contract to construct and supply CNG filling stations throughout the country.149

One unnamed Burmese engineer has stated on condition of anonymity that “CNG-powered vehicles are frequently allowed to bypass the license registration process, because officials from the car licensing office were prepared to overlook safety aspects if the vehicle owners paid under-the-table for a quick license”.150

While not as palpable as the detonation of bombs on the city’s streets (as described above), the fact remains that the SPDC and IGE Co Ltd are still liable for the numerous deaths which occurred due to the lack of quality control conducted during the conversion process. It is thus highly likely that both explosions explained below occurred as a result of gross negligence resulting in the deaths of at least seven persons during 2008 alone.

This photograph shows the fiery wreckage of public bus No. 45 after it had exploded on the morning of 8 September 2008. Though it is not known conclusively, it is believed that the CNG tank aboard the bus had ruptured and exploded. While no deaths were recorded from the explosion, at least two persons were reported as having been injured in the blast. For more information, see the description of the incident below. [Photo: © Irrawaddy]

On 8 September 2008, at least two passengers were wounded when an explosion occurred on the bus they were travelling on in Kamayut Township, Rangoon. The blast occurred at approximately 11:00 am as the bus was nearing the crowded Hledan Junction along route No. 45 between Insein and Sule. It remains unknown if the explosion was caused by a bomb or if the compressed natural gas (CNG) tank had ruptured and exploded. According to
eyewitnesses, the injured included one elderly woman and the bus’ “handyman” (presumably a reference to the bus conductor): "When I arrived at the spot, the bus was on fire and most of it had been charred. The handyman [conductor] of the bus was severely injured. Blood was all over his legs”. No further details have been made available. The photograph reproduced on the preceding page shows the bus soon after the explosion.151

On 13 October 2008, at least seven commuters were killed and another critically injured when the bus they were travelling in exploded. While no formal explanation was given, it was believed that the CNG gas tank had ruptured, causing the blast. The bus had reportedly been travelling between Taikkyi Township and Rangoon’s main vegetable market at Thiri Mingalar, at approximately 2:00 am when it exploded in front of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) office. The blast reportedly killed the driver, the conductor, and five passengers, and left another passenger in a critical condition. Eyewitnesses maintained that it took five hours for the police to arrive on the scene. As a result of this latest blast, along with other recent explosions also believed to have been caused by exploding CNG tanks (see incident listed above), commuters expressed their reluctance to board public buses and taxis.152 However, in spite of this fear, many Rangoon residents have acknowledged their obligation to continue using these buses irrespective of their hesitation to do so:

“We have to use the CNG vehicles, even though we are afraid of gas explosions, because every passenger bus and pickup truck has been transformed to CNG in the past three years. … Perhaps 80 percent of taxis are also running on CNG. We have no way of escaping it." 153
Endnotes


5 Source: Ibid.


8 Source: HRDU email communication with Yeshua-Moser Puangsuwan, Burma researcher for the Landmine Monitor, 3 April 2009.


20 Source: Ibid.


31 Source: Ibid.


Chapter 4: Landmines and Other Explosive Devices

37 Source: Ibid.
38 Source: Ibid.
39 Source: Ibid.
49 Source: Ibid.
52 Sources: Ibid.
53 Sources: Ibid.
55 Source: Mortar attacks, landmines and the destruction of schools in Papun District, KHRG, 22 August 2008.
70 Source: “BDR, Nasaka Hold Flag Meet in Cox's Bazar” New Age (Bangladesh), 30 June 2008.
73 Source: Ibid.

National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB)
75. Source: Ibid.
79. Source: Human minesweeping and forced relocation as SPDC and DKBA step up joint operations in Pa’an District, KHRG, 20 October 2008.
83. Source: Ibid.
84. Source: Mortar attacks, landmines and the destruction of schools in Papun District, KHRG, 22 August 2008.
85. Source: Human minesweeping and forced relocation as SPDC and DKBA step up joint operations in Pa’an District, KHRG, 20 October 2008.
87. Sources: Ibid.
98. Source: Ibid.
103. Source: Ibid.
110. Source: Ibid.
111. Source: Ibid.


150 Source: *Ibid*.


The Human Rights Documentation Unit (HRDU) is the research and documentation division of Burma’s government in exile; the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB). The HRDU was formed in 1994 to document the human rights crisis confronting the many and varied peoples of Burma, and to defend and promote those internationally recognised human rights that are inherent and inalienable for all persons irrespective of race, colour, creed, ethnicity or religion. To this end, the HRDU published the first Burma Human Rights Yearbook in 1995 to comprehensively document the systematic and egregious nature of the human rights abuses being perpetrated in Burma throughout the previous year. This report, the Burma Human Rights Yearbook 2008, represents the 15th annual edition of the Burma Human Rights Yearbook, which, combined with all previous editions collectively comprise well over 10,000 pages of documentation and provide an unbroken historical record spanning the past one and a half decades.

All editions of the Burma Human Rights Yearbook and all other reports published by the HRDU can be viewed online on the NCGUB website at http://www.ncgub.net as well as on the Online Burma Library at http://www.burmalibrary.org. Any questions, comments or requests for further information can be forwarded to the HRDU via email at enquiries.hrdu@gmail.com.

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