

# Inside News

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## Burma

No freedom of

**Assembly**

No freedom of

**Expression**

No freedom of

**Association**

2100 political

**Prisoners**

**free and fair  
election?**



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# Little good can be expected from this regime

National elections orchestrated by Burma's military regime and to be held sometime this year have little hope of being fair. The regime still jails its political opponents, people are forbidden to meet, write or discuss politics. The regime bans foreign journalists, refuses to acknowledge the dire economic position Burma is in.

Millions of Burmese citizens, with little chance of earning enough to feed their families, seek work in other countries. Those who stay do not have access to decent health care and have to leave their homes to look for treatment in neighboring countries.

The Burmese peoples' popular leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi - winner of the last elections held in Burma - is still kept under house arrest. A cynical plot designed to keep her from contesting elections in 2010.

Each year Burma tops the worlds' worst list for corruption, poor health, food insecurity, child soldiers and human rights abuses. The regimes huge army continues its campaign of terror against ethnic villagers, destroying thousands of villages and forcing hundreds of thousands of people into displacement. Yet against this backdrop, some international governments and NGO talk of having hopes that elections, controlled by the Burmese military regime, will somehow be fair.

With the regimes appalling history of neglect of Burma and its citizens - its destruction of civil society, its relentless pursuit and jailing of political opponents the regime have lost any right to claim its election will be legitimate. Against the current political background in Burma there is no way that these elections can be called democratic. If the international community wants democratic change in Burma, and they want that change to come through the ballot box, then insist on international monitors and observers and a lifting of restrictions on the media and free speech, allow its political opponents a fair chance to inform the electorate.

Meanwhile, the regime needs to be a closely scrutinized, not only does it plan to use the election to shift power to a 'civilian proxy', but it is making moves to shift the country's wealth to selected shady 'business partners' through a bamboozling 'privatization' scheme.

Little good can be expected from this regime, as it is nothing more than criminal carpetbaggers masquerading as soldiers.

## MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

If you want to find out how you can help internally displaced Karen people: email [cidkp@yahoo.com](mailto:cidkp@yahoo.com), [blacktownhacket@hotmail.com](mailto:blacktownhacket@hotmail.com) or write to CIDKP, PO Box 22, Mae Sot, Tak 63110, Thailand.



Photo: Burma Liberation Front

## Burma's free and fair election — just a rumor?

Despite condemnation by the international community and the democratic opposition within Burma, the Naypyidaw generals have reached the final step of their much criticized, 'roadmap to democracy'. In spite of the criticism, all statements from the regime suggest they are keen to forge ahead with its proposed 2010 general election. The regime critics say basic conditions for free and fair election in Burma do not exist. Thousands of political activists languish in prison. Human rights groups have documented ongoing abuses, including forced labor, extra-judicial killings, rape and detention without trial. Draconian laws forbid journalists from reporting opposition political views, and dissent of any kind is met with brutal repression.

Saw Eh Htoo 30, the joint secretary of the Karen Youth Organization (KYO) is preparing an awareness campaign to inform communities in Karen State.

"The KYO and Burma Issues (BI) will produce a documentary film and pamphlets about what people should expect a free and fair elections should be. With the ongoing human rights violations in Burma it is not possible to hold free and fair elections. We will go inside Karen state with these materials and talk to villagers in order for them to have more knowledge on the election."

Against a background of international criticism the Burma military regime ratified its constitution during the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis. The regime claimed over 90 percent of

Burmese people voted 'yes' to approve the constitution. The regime's constitution was written by 'hand-picked delegates' and was declared a 'sham' by many international rights groups.

Eh Htoo says many of the 'yes' votes from Karen villagers, are disputed, as many villagers never took part in the referendum election and were unaware of the issues.

"We don't want that to happen again. We know that we can't stop the Burma military [from holding its election] government but we will educate our villagers about their rights, what the conditions should be for a free and fair election, how to vote and who to vote for. At the same time, we will also discuss the constitution and what's right or wrong with it."

The National League for Democracy (NLD) and other opposition groups have requested a review of the new constitution, which mandates the SPDC to retain 25 percent of all seats in Parliament. Exiled political groups are also boycotting the SPDC's election. Groups backed by the regimes are doing many activities regarding the election.

"It is the plan of the regime to wait until the last minute to announce the election to secure their victory."

Meanwhile in the confusion, the regime-backed organization, Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) has engaged in pre-election activities, such as building roads, bridges and other social welfare activities.

"They [USDA] have been campaigning quite extensively for the election," says a Rangoon resident Karen woman who spoke

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# 2010 Election: Voter registration starts

**Villagers have no experience of elections. They do not know how to vote or what is the right way to vote.**



Burma's election date is still a mystery, but government officials are preparing electoral processes at a local level. *Inside News* investigates.

The Burma military regime has given the order for local or township officials to start voter registration for the proposed 2010 election. Villages in Myawaddy Township, Karen State began registration in January.

A local village headman spoke to *Inside News* on the condition of anonymity said he had been

ordered to collect names of eligible voters.

"Myawaddy township officials ordered us to collect the names of villagers who are above 18 for the [2010] election. They told us that those who don't have a Myanmar ID card, will be given one. We haven't been told of the electoral processes, political parties or the date. We have no rights. We don't know who to vote for."

This is the military government's first elections in 20 years as the next step in the regimes much

criticized "roadmap to democracy."

The village headman says villagers have no experience of elections. They do not know how to vote or what is the right way to vote. The village headman said that he tried to collect the names of everyone who is of legal age to vote, in order to avoid problems with officials.

"In my village we have 134 households and 270 people who are above 18. If I do not give the names I worry that they [SPDC officials] will impose restrictions on us. Villagers don't know anything, we are under their control. We can only do as they order us. We have no right to protest."

Human Right Watch launched a global campaign "2100 by 2010" for the release of 2,100 political prisoners currently held in Burma.

The aim of the campaign is to highlight the lack of fundamental rights under the regime and that conditions for free and fair elections do not exist in Burma.

The Burma regime's proposed elections contravene the United Nations 'Article 25 of the Covenant' that "recognizes and protects the right of every citizen to take part in the conduct of public affairs, the right to vote and to be elected and the right to have access to public service."

The headman says. "I think the election will change nothing for us.



If the current leadership retains control we will not get our rights. Our ethnic nationalities will not get any freedom. Burma's conflict will not end after the election."

Meanwhile, government officials are pressing ahead with voter registration in remote villages. Villagers say they are being forced to sign their names.

**"We can only do as they order us. We have no right to protest."**

They fear their names and signatures will be used illegally in the election.

A villager from Pha Pra village in Doo Pla Ya district said officials started registration of villagers who have Myanmar identity cards

and all those who are over 18.

"The SPDC ordered the DKBA to come to our village and collect the villagers' name and they order us to sign our name on the paper. They tell us that we will be included in 2010 election."

Villagers are worried that their names might be used to vote for candidates they have not picked.

"They can use our signatures to vote for people we don't want."

Villagers say they have not been informed about the election or who or what political parties will run in the election. Villagers have also received threats from officials. "They said if we don't sign we will be arrested. We are worried they will restrict our movements, stop us traveling to our work. We're scared so we sign."

Khun Myint Tun, an elected MP of the NLD party in the 1990 election says.

"The regime doesn't allow people to discuss politics or gather together with more than five people. If they see more than five people in a group, they arrest them. If we are to have a fair election we need freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and freedom of speech in Burma." Khu Myint Tun was part of the delegation drafted to write the constitution. After harassment by officials he walked out.

"The process was crazy. There were 1000 people who wrote the constitution. If we compare it with US constitution, there were 55 people who wrote the constitution and they wrote it in six-months. Because the constitution is so flawed the international community wants the regime to review it, but as it gives power to the military, the regime resists all attempts to change it."

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to *Inside News* on guarantee of anonymity. "They concreted all unpaved roads in our section and have changed the names of those roads to some words from their organization's name."

The woman also said that the regime is making sure that every vote cast will be for them or their other SPDC backed-parties; including the National Unity Party (NUP). The NUP was formed by the military and represented the regime in the 1990 election. It is believed that the NUP will represent them again in the 2010 election.

"It is always the same. The USDA and NUP are backed by the generals. In our area where the Karen are populated, we will have a Karen candidate who is from NUP. So, even if the Karen

candidate wins, the votes are theirs [regime]."

But she still has hope that a Karen candidate will make more of a difference than the regime appointed one.

"At least it might be better to have a Karen representative in the Karen populated areas."

Saw Eh Htoo doubts that there would be any Karen party genuinely representing the Karen. If so, he would be happy to encourage people to vote for a party that represents ethnic nationalities and democratic principles.

"If they can refuse to go to a polling station, then we will tell them to do so. But if they must go, we will encourage them to vote a blank ballot or invalid vote or vote for democracy groups."

The last election in Burma

was in 1990. The NLD won a massive majority of the seats in the parliament. Eh Htoo says many eligible young voters have had no experience of voting, yet there is no public education about the issues. However, the regime's officials have started collecting names of people over 18 from households in urban and rural areas.

"It has been twenty years since the last election, many young people will vote for the first time. If the election is in the interest of the people, there should have been an extensive education or awareness raising campaign about election issues by now." in their life. If the election is for the interest of the people, there should have been an extensive education or awareness raising campaign regarding election issues by now."

*The junta's election preparations have a depressingly familiar ring to them. Phil Thornton reports from Thai-Burma border.*

## Burma's Bleak Election Plans

The military regime that rules Burma with an iron fist claims it will hold 'free' and 'fair' elections in 2010—the supposed crowning moment of its self-lauded 'Roadmap to Democracy.' But these claims have been denounced by opposition groups, who say the proposed elections are nothing more than the final step in the hijacking of the democratic process with the intention of extending the regime's military control through a rigged ballot and the election of a civilian proxy.

Moe Zaw Oo, joint secretary of the exiled branch of the National League for Democracy, says there's not a politician in a democratic society who would accept the military regime's conditions for the election.

'It's supposed to be this year, it's already March and they have yet to tell us the election date. How can we organize our campaigns and canvass our constituents?' Moe Zaw asks. 'You can see the election is rigged—look at the Electoral Laws. Look at the Electoral Commission. Look at the Constitution.'

Moe Zaw says the junta is leaving little to chance.

'They handpicked their own man, Maj. Gen. Thein Soe, as the electoral commissioner and he'll allow them [the regime] to do what they want, within and according to their law.'

One of the Electoral Laws, the Political Party Registration Law, allows the Committee to reject



Photo: Irrawaddy

party applications. It also bans democracy organisations, armed groups opposed to the regime, groups or individuals receiving outside support and about 2,100 political prisoners from taking part in the elections. This includes National League for Democracy leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as 430 jailed NLD members.

The party has 60 days to register with the Election Committee if it intends to contest the elections, with the committee having the right to reject the NLD's application.

This places Burma's main political opposition party, the NLD, in a tough position. By barring its charismatic leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, it effectively checkmates the NLD. If the NLD wants to contest the 2010 elections, they have to kick her out of the party within 60 days.\*

The laws are a clear signal of the regime's election intentions towards the NLD even though it has disingenuously denied, through the state-controlled media, that its laws were devised with the objective of banning 'a certain person from standing for election.'

Ko Tate Naing, secretary of political prisoner advocacy group AAPP, says if political prisoners are not released all international governments should reject the 2010 elections.

'Without the release of all political prisoners there can be no national reconciliation or democracy in Burma,' Ko Tate says. 'The current election laws aimed at disqualifying political prisoners are meant to restrict all opposition groups.'

The electoral laws also drew flak from a number of international humanitarian groups, according to Brad Adams, Asia director at New York-based Human Rights Watch. 'The new law's assault on opposition parties is sadly predictable,' he says. 'It continues the sham political process that is aimed at creating the appearance of civilian rule with a military spine.'

The electoral laws also nullify the result of the 1990 election, which the NLD won in a landslide by securing more than 80 percent of the seats.

Khun Myint Tun, an exiled Burmese member of parliament

who in 1990 won the seat of Phatun in Mon State, called the 2010 elections a farce.

‘Under this military regime we have no freedom of association, no freedom of speech and no freedom of assembly. How can it ever be a fair and free election?’ Another huge sticking point for Khun Myint Tun and the opposition is that under the electoral law, all political parties must pledge to abide by and protect the much-hated 2008 Constitution.

#### ‘Constitution is a sham’

The regime took 18 years to complete the much-criticized document. In its initial stages, Khun Myint Tun was drafted to attend the National Convention to work on the Constitution, but after three years of having his phone tapped, his mail opened and being followed and threatened with jail for breaches of national security, he decided to leave. He says the national referendum in 2008 that voted in the Constitution was a sham.

‘They had the audacity to ignore the plight of millions of homeless Burmese people devastated by Cyclone Nargis and went ahead with their referendum vote to endorse their constitution,’ he says. Khun Myint Tun says the Constitution is designed, in spite of election outcomes, to ensure the regime keeps control by giving 25 percent of parliamentary seats to serving military officers.

‘Under the Constitution, the president has to have military experience, and the military will control three key ministries; defence, home affairs and border areas administration,’ Khun Myint Tun says. ‘People married to foreigners—and no surprise here, this includes Aung San Suu Kyi—are banned from holding parliamentary seats.’

It’s not surprising the regime is scared of Aung San Suu Kyi and her proven political appeal—she

has an impressive track record. A landslide election victory in 1990 and video footage from her visit to rural Burma in 2003 underscores her political impact, with the jerky footage showing streets and buildings lined with tens of thousands of people waiting to catch sight of her or hear her speak. At the time, the massive crowds of people that turned out for her shook the regime, which responded with state sponsored thugs who attacked her car and supporters, killing 74 and injuring hundreds more.

But it’s not only exiled Burmese politicians who are concerned about the lack of fairness in the 2010 election process.



In early March, UN special rapporteur Tomas Quintana said in his report on human rights in Burma that ‘...the international community has urged the government of Myanmar to announce an election date and an electoral framework that adheres to international standards for a free, fair, participatory and transparent election process.’

The release of the Electoral Laws has angered both the US and UK governments, who say the regime is fast removing what little credibility its elections have.

Quintana’s report reinforces the international community’s

insistence that the regime release political prisoners before the elections, ‘...the Security Council, Government representatives from many nations, Nobel laureates and respected leaders have all called for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and the more than 2,100 prisoners of conscience.’

Moe Zaw says Burmese migrant workers are also denied their rights. ‘There are about two million migrants who won’t be able to vote. Most won’t be able to get time off work or afford the travel and there will be no postal votes. Our organisation and many other groups in exile are classified under the electoral laws as illegal and we won’t be allowed to vote or be part of the campaigning.’

Naing, a rural worker on the Thai-Burma border, agrees and says he wants to go back to Burma and vote.

‘We talk about it, we’ve waited a long time, but we can’t plan for it—we don’t know when it will be held,’ he says. ‘We’re worried if we go back we won’t be able to leave again.’

Yet nobody, least of all the international community, should be surprised by this latest move from the junta. The regime has been putting its election strategy in place for a long time, but most foreign diplomats ignored the warning signs and hoped the regime would be willing to loosen its grip on power. In 2009, in what many international human rights groups saw as a cynical move by the junta, political opponents were locked up in order to remove them from the political arena before the 2010 elections. Monks, lawyers, artists, doctors, poets, activists and journalists were all swept up in the purge and sentenced to jail terms of between 18 months and 69 years.

The most high profile arrest was Aung San Suu Kyi. Already under house arrest since 2003, she was

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Burma's proposed national election is now more concrete since the regime announced the electoral laws. *Inside News* talks to young people from different ethnic nationalities to get their views and opinions on the upcoming election.



"It doesn't matter if the Kachin people participate in the election. It won't change the status of the Kachin people. Not many Kachin people are even aware of the election. The people are struggling for their daily survival and they don't have time for the election, as they have to worry about what they are going eat, find work. I don't hear people talking about the election." – **Ring Aung, an ethnic Kachin journalist**

"After the election, if the emerging government were not able to genuinely solve the ethnic issues, our country would not be able to head to democracy. The Border Guard Force (BGF) program is causing problems among ethnic groups. The BGF will not only guard their respective area but will have to do what they are ordered to do by the Burmese regime. The regime itself has created splits and many small-armed factions within each ethnic group. The worst situation is the Karen, where the regime has manipulated factions to fight among themselves. Everyone will know that this election is an event of lies. During the 1990 election the regime was honest, but refused to handover power to the winning party. Instead of starting a peace process by having ceasefires with all ethnic armed groups and by releasing all political prisoners, the regime is holding an election. This is like treating illness with the wrong medication."

**Min Sai Non Daw, an ethnic Mon editor (Kawao Newsgroup)**

"The SPDC is saying that 2010 election is the solution to bring democratic change to Burma. But in fact a general election is not the right answer, it makes the situation even more complex. The regime should honor the result of the 1990 election and implement it. Look at the regime's action now, they favor groups



such as the NUP, USDA, old BCP members and people like Aye Lwin, by letting them campaign and assemble for the 2010 general election. Meanwhile, other genuine political parties' and their members are charged and were put in jail. Journalists can be charged with sentences far worse than a criminal. This 2010 general election will not be a free and fair one. A country where there is no freedom of the press, there can't be democracy.

In Arakan State, the regime-backed thugs are campaigning forcibly and oppressing genuine politicians. Under these conditions, the 2010 election will not bring any benefit to the Arakanese or to the people of Burma." **Htay Win, an ethnic Arakan editor (Arakan National Newspaper)**



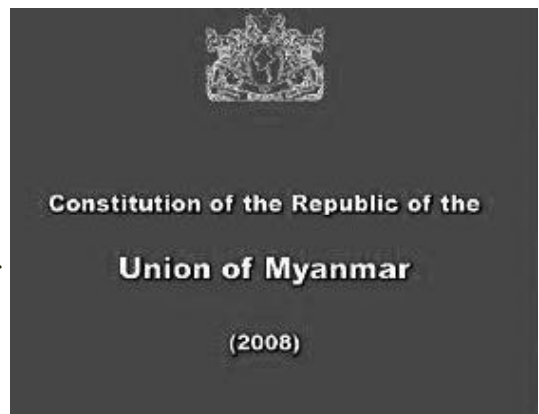
# ...about the election



“While some groups consider the 2010 election as a “widow opportunity”, other opposition groups believe there is no chance we can move towards democracy from this election. It is not possible to forget how the 2008 constitution was approved by the use of force. This constitution does not guarantee any democratic rights. There is no guarantee for equal rights for ethnic nationalities. We, ethnic nationalities, have been fighting for equality and self-determination for over 60 years. The 2010 election will not deliver what ethnic nationalities have been fighting for. The election commission and the party registration law clearly show that the 2010 election will not be free and fair. The 2010 election is not the end of our struggle. We have to continue fighting until we gain what we want. It doesn’t matter how many elections come up. If the result does not answer our needs, we have to continue fighting.”

—**Naw Htoo Paw, an ethnic Karen woman activist**

"There is no guarantee that this election will bring any better political alternatives for the people of Burma. The military junta is trying to legitimate their oppression of its civilians through the election. It is better not to participate in this election. Than Shwe is currently above the constitution and the constitution itself is not legitimate. That is because, 25 percent of seats in the parliament are already in the hands of the military. It is a trick and the regime will never transfer power to the people." **Khu 2 2 (Htoo Htoo), an ethnic Karenni university student**



"As ethnic nationalities, this election will not result in guaranteeing equal rights and ethnic rights that we have been asking for. This is totally against what the ethnic nationalities willing to build a federal union of Burma want and is only adding more sparks to the flame of civil war. At the same time, if the ongoing human right abuses and violations against women continue unpunished and just go ahead with the election, the human right situation could get worse. Look at their Election Commission, it is obvious that they stacked it with their people who will do what they want. I don't accept this 2010 election organized by the regime for the regime." **Lway Moe Kham, an ethnic Palaung woman activist**

"The upcoming general election will only be just an organized act of state to change their military uniforms into civilian ones and they will keep on controlling the institutions of state. The election without people accepted delegates and a properly written constitution in accordance with the will of people is totally absurd and unreasonable. Our country should have a well-written constitution that guarantees our freedoms and equal rights. Otherwise these elections are unfair and are not free. In the 2008 constitution, there is not a single provision which can guarantee the rights of ethnic peoples. I don't support the election and will not participate in voting because it is clear that we are forced to vote to give the military a mandate to rule our country."

**Nang Phaung Khio, an ethnic Shan youth activist**



# Leave us alone!

## I wanted to live in my own country

*In spite of international outrage, the Burmese army continues to batter, kill and displace thousands of villagers in eastern Burma. Phil Thornton investigates.*

It's hot. Brown dust sticks to sweat. Choking smoke from forest fires blurs the distant Burmese mountains. Overhead, giant hardwood trees soar 24 metre and more.

Saw Naw Tu, an animist, stops walking, wipes his glasses, kneels and prays to the forest gods for their help to get us safely to where his family is hiding from the Burma Army.

To get to his home, we have a 12km walk, a 1500 metre mountain to climb up and down and a 3km hike along a dense jungle valley wedged between the mountains. A trek, 67-year-old Saw Naw Tu has to do at least twice a month if he needs supplies or medicines.

"If we want rice we have to walk to the border and carry it back here. I can only manage about 20kg. I do that every two weeks as we need about 32kg a month for the two of us."

Life has been tough for Saw Naw Tu since 1997 when the Burma army attacked his village, Htee Yo Khi, and drove him and his family from their home.

"I think of our old life, but I cannot do anything about it. Our farm was on flatland. It had good, deep soil and good water. We used to grow beetle nuts, coconuts, mangoes, jackfruit, pomelo and many fruit trees. We grew all the vegetables, pumpkins, potatoes, beans, chilies, tomatoes and cucumbers."

Saw Naw Tu says he and his family had to run when Burma army divisions 22 and 44 attacked. "They fired every type of weapon at us, big shells...small shells...

rockets...bullets. They killed people, some were tortured, some where beaten to death, like our neighbor, Maw Bee, he was only in his 30's with two small kids. We had no choice but to leave."

Saw Naw Tu took refuge in Thailand but found life, as a refugee wasn't for him or his family. After the Burma army destroyed his house and farm, Saw Naw Tu built his current home in a hard-to-reach valley.

"I wanted to live in my own country. Since they destroyed our farm in 1997 we have lived in four places. We found this place two years ago."

Saw Naw Tu and his family are not the only ones hiding and running from the Burmese army. The Thai Burma Border Consortium stated in their latest report - *Protracted Displacement and Militarization in eastern Burma* - that as many as "...470,000 people are currently estimated to be internally displaced in the rural areas of eastern Burma alone."

The TBBC report says 3,500 villages have been destroyed or forcibly relocated since 1996, including 120 communities between August 2008 and July 2009 - that's as many as 75,000 people. The TBBC compares it to the situation in Darfur and says it is "...recognized as the strongest single indicator of crimes against humanity in eastern Burma."

The TBBC report identifies landmines and Burma army patrols as the major and fastest growing threat to villagers. This is not surprising as the Burmese army has a third of its army stationed in eastern Burma, an estimated 235 battalions, at their lowest



Photo - Phil Thornton



strength about 35,250 soldiers. According to eyewitnesses who recently returned from eastern Burma, the Burma army continues to kill, torture, landmine and force villagers from their homes.

A relief team leader from the humanitarian organisation, Free Burma Rangers, who has just returned from a four-month mission deep inside Karen State, explained what he saw. "The first [Burma army] attacks started in late January 2010 and 1000 villagers in Ler Doh and 1,000 in Hsaw Hti were displaced and three people were killed. In February, a clinic, 14 schools and 125 houses were destroyed. On 19 February, soldiers from Military Operation Command 7 attacked a school at Ta U Plaw, Papun District, two students were wounded and another died from his wounds."

The team leader says the military regime has divided rural Burma into three zones: 'white' under the control of the Burma army; 'brown', contested areas; and 'black' where villagers, men women and children, are shot-on-sight.

FBR has 53 teams delivering emergency medical assistance to displaced communities in eastern Burma. The FBR team leader says people are in need of immediate medical care, food, shelter, clothing, blankets and pots and pans.

"The Burma army has been relentless. They have mined farmlands and villages, taken people as forced labor and on this trip I saw a lot more child soldiers. They burn rice fields as they patrol. If they don't stop [the attacks] before the wet season, and villagers are unable to plant their rice crop, the situation will be critical."

The team leader said displaced people, unable to return to their villages for their rice stores will not have enough food to stay healthy. "Living on the run is tough.

Malaria, dysentery, acute respiratory infections are hard enough to deal with at the best of times, but living rough, they become life threatening."

The FBR's team leader's insights supported a briefing paper put out by the Karen Human Rights Group that blames the food crisis in rural Karen State as a result of "...the direct consequence of systematic military predation." KHRG says "excessive military demands, the extortion and destruction of food stocks, and restrictions upon movement of food, amongst other abuses, leave villagers with insufficient food supplies and a lack of diversity in their diets."

A young Burmese officer, Ye Htet, who recently deserted, blames the lawlessness among soldiers on an order from military headquarters that instructs regional commanders that they have to 'meet their supply needs locally'.

"The villagers have little, but the army demands rice, vegetables, pigs, chickens and cigarettes. If the villages don't give to us we just take. It depends on the attitude of the commander, but soldiers know they can't be punished so they just take what they want."

**Each time we hear they are coming we move closer to the [Thai] border.**

Ye Htet explained how the [Burma] army reports on villagers killed.

"It's routine, in our reports, the dead are described as 'insurgents' or 'spies', never villagers. If the army wants to destroy a village they 'accuse' them of being opposition soldiers. This lets the army attack. Villages not on our maps are considered enemies – all villagers men, women and children

are treated the same, they are killed."

The attacks on civilians are constant. In June 2009, 1300 go vernment troops attacked the internally displaced village of Ler Per Her situated on the Burmese side of the River Moei. Thai authorities said more than 4,000 villagers living in the area and surrounding hills took refuge in Thailand. The Burmese soldiers, before leaving Ler Per Her, booby-trapped walkways, gardens, rice stores, schoolyards and homes making it impossible for refugees to return safely. Between 2006 and 2007 in northern Karen State a Burmese military operation known as 'Clean Sweep' destroyed villages, forcing more than 76,000 people from their homes into makeshift jungle hideouts. As many as 5,000 made the arduous journey to Thai Burma border and set up camp at Ei Tu Hta on the Burmese side of the Salween River. But getting to the border is no guarantee of safety. The Burma army has been known to fire mortars at refugees on the Thai side. On 15 February a Karen villager, Saw Law Ray Htoo, was shot dead by Burma army soldiers while traveling on a Salween riverboat north of Ei Tu Hta camp. The Burma army is not only intent at shooting and killing unarmed civilians, it also forces villagers to carry supplies and ammunition. People are forced to march and walk in front of patrols to explode landmines and to deter Karen soldiers from attacking.

Saw Naw Tu says his jungle skills have attracted the attention of the Burma army who see him as the best guide to take them through the forests communities.

"They have tried to arrest me many times. My grandparents taught me how to read the land, where to find water and plants for food and

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# We don't have options, we have to defend ourselves!

By: Naw Htoo Paw\*

The political goal of the 60-year-old Karen struggle, contrary to opinions, held both by political pundits and some commentators in the international media, is *not independence* from Burma, but to exist in a federal union. The Karen people want to live in their own state. We want equality, self-determination and freedom like those of other states in a future federal union of Burma.

Currently, we Karen do not have many options to achieve this. Our first choice has always been to try to have a peaceful political dialogue with the various Burmese regimes – today named the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) - when that has failed we have had little choice but to continue our armed struggle for the protection of our people and our political survival.

Many observers ask 'why are the Karen still fighting?'.

For over 60 years, Karen leaders have attempted to put peaceful solutions on the table to discuss, to try to negotiate without further bloodshed. Between 1949 and 2005 the Karen National Union (KNU) has met five times with the Burmese regime for 'peace talks'. Each time they have failed, why? The first meeting was in April 1949 with the Burmese Prime Minister U Nu. During the talks, instead of trying to find best solution for both sides, the Burmese government had no agenda other than the Karen surrender. The Karen delegation was also threatened with

detention. During the 'peace talks' the Burmese regime shown complete disdain for the Karen by ordering Burmese army to attack Karen civilians.

The second meeting held in 1959, was led by General Ne Win who demanded the Karen lay down their arms and suggested they should 'discuss the Karen grievances later'. Hostilities continued during the meeting and again there was no opportunity for a genuine dialogue or peace.

The third talk took place in 1963 again with with General Ne Win at the helm. He was now the leader of Burma's first military regime. Ne Win made overtures to all of the armed groups for a conditional ceasefire; his offer depended on all of the armed groups to hand-in their weapons. General Ne Win did not offer in return any conditions to the groups for trusting his demands. Instead more Burmese army soldiers' troops were sent as reinforcements to Karen areas and again attacked villages.

The fourth series of talks were in 1996 and led by General Khin Nyunt, the SPDC's General Secretary 1. There were four rounds of talks held during the year. The regime demanded the KNU renounce their armed struggle and enter the so-called 'legal fold'. But the regime refused to listen or talk with the KNU about a political solution.

The last and most recent 'peace talks' were held between 2003 until 2005. General Khin Nyunt, was now Burma's Prime Minister, and represented the SPDC and the KNU vice-president General Bo Mya spoke for the Karen.

In January 2004, a verbal cease-fire agreement was accepted by both sides, and was known as the "Gentlemen Agreement". This verbal agreement ended because the Burmese army troops launched their 'Operation Clean-Sweep' offensive against Karen positions.

The so-called 'peace talks' have all failed because the only position offered to the Karen by the various Burmese regimes has been for us to surrender. The failure of the Burmese regimes to solve the situation is evidence of the regimes





lack of willingness to solve the situation by using political means and to engage in a genuine peaceful dialogue. So far the regime has shown a determination to eradicate all ethnic struggle by force — this is not a solution or long-term prospect for Burma.

The Karen have had little option but to continue their armed struggle. Unfortunately, for the Karen people they have been made to pay. We have no opportunity develop our communities, instead our people have been denied their social, economic and culture rights. The military regime have continued - in spite of the documentation by international and local human rights groups - to suffer crimes against humanity by the military

regime. We have little or no choice, we have to continue to resist and to try to protect our communities against the Burmese army who continue to rape and tortured our family members.



**The Karen have had little option but to continue their armed struggle.**



If this sounds aggressive and bitter, it is the reality for Karen families. Our villagers cannot work their farms because of being taken as forced laborers, our people are arrested and tortured, murdered,

‘disappeared’, shot-on-sight and our women, mothers and sisters are systematically sexually abused and raped as a weapon of war by the Burmese army.

There are many reports written by independent human rights groups that document the proof of these atrocities committed by the Burmese army. As many as 200,000 Karen suffer the indignity of living in their own country as displaced people, another 145,000 are refugees in Thailand. We cannot wait any longer for the international community to stop the crimes against our people. We have to continue to protect ourselves as best we can. Unfortunately, this is our only option.

\*The opinion that expressed in this article is not necessary of *Inside News*.

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taken to Insein Jail and charged with breaches of her detention. She was later sentenced to another 18 months. At the time, her arrest ignited a furious response from abroad, with Asian and European foreign ministers meeting in Vietnam in May 2009 calling for the release of all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and the lifting of all restrictions on political parties. But the regime ignored them, waiting until the situation died down and international attention was diverted elsewhere before releasing its Electoral Law.

The Burmese junta rarely responds to international pressure. Over the years, a series of high profile politicians and diplomats have all been used by the regime in what amounts to nothing more than charade. Eventually, the ‘meaningful discussions’ meander into nothing. Meanwhile the army continues to attack ethnic communities, political prisoners are tortured and the regime tightens its grip on control. Each time the regime manages to sideline and reduce the international community to little more than frustrated spectators playing catch-up.

And this time it is no different—the international community is committed to an election, but a fair and free election is looking more and more like a pipedream. If the electoral laws are allowed to stand unchanged, the regime has its political opponents right where they want them—divided.

In the last three years, Burma was involved in three events that have shocked the world; the Saffron Revolution crackdown, Cyclone Nargis and its aftermath and the unprovoked Burma army attacks on ethnic villagers in eastern Burma.

On each occasion the junta’s leaders, in spite of criticism, have managed to avoid a UN Security Council inquiry or an inquiry into crimes against humanity, due largely to support for the regime from Council members China and Russia.

The 16th ASEAN Summit in Vietnam in early April offers an opportunity for its members to lobby the regime over its electoral laws and the inclusion of Aung San Suu Kyi in the country’s election, but Khun Myint Tun says he doesn’t hold out much hope, considering ASEAN’s past support for the regime.

Against this dismal background, and what has been a bad month for

Burma’s political opposition, the UN’s Quintana report is the only positive. In his report, Quintana said his mission to Burma in February raised serious doubts for a fair election, and he noted restrictions on freedoms of expression, assembly and association had not been lifted.

On March 24, the UK government offered its support to Quintana’s call for the establishment of a UN Commission of Inquiry to investigate crimes against humanity and war crimes perpetrated by the Burma regime. Its ambassador to the United Nations, Mark Lyell Grant, says Britain would support the referral of a case to the International Criminal Court, a statement that followed the Australian government’s decision to back any commission of inquiry.

But if this fails, then Burma’s political opposition will be left with the unappetizing choice of boycotting the election or going to the polls knowing they may well be effectively rigged. Either way the generals win.

\*NLD later decided to boycott the election

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Note: This article appeared in ‘*The Diplomat Magazine*’

# Burma Army attacks and burns villages

## The soldiers burnt houses and displaced over 1,000 villagers

On the 17 January, 2010 the Burma Army's Light Infantry Battalion 367 attacked Keh Der village in Nyaunglebin killing villagers, the soldiers burnt houses and displaced over 1,000 villagers.

*The Karen Human Rights Group reported that by 22 January villagers were on the run. "At least 1,000 villagers have fled from ten villages during the last five days following the establishment of a new SPDC Army camp in central Nyaunglebin District."*

The Committee of Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP) field staff also confirmed the attacks and said that when soldiers assaulted Keh Der village, a civilian, Saw Mya Kaw Htoo, 47 was killed, he was survived by his wife Naw Mu Wah and six children.

The soldiers attacked the village again in the afternoon burning 11 houses, including a school hostel.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> January 2010 the attacks had spread to Tu Gaw Soe village and soldiers from LIB 367 killed Saw Eh Moo, a villager, his wife and five children survived.

*More than a 1,000 villagers from Keh Der,*

Kho Taw Khi, Ta Kaw Der, Thaw Kho Hta, Ler Taw Lu, Day Baw Khi, Mu Khi, Htee Loe Khi, Tu Gaw Soe and Kho Lu had to abandon their houses, livestock and take refuge in the jungle.

Naw Htee Shee, a CIDKP field staff from the area says; "Villagers could only carry a littler rice, a few pots and plates. It's the cold season and villagers without their blankets and warm clothes will find it difficult, especially the young and the old."

A media statement from the Karen National Union said Burma army soldiers in Kler Lwee Htu district were looting and burning villagers food and belongings.

"...troops from SPDC LIB 362 attacked Saw Pwe Say's hut in Baw Hsi Lo and stole 15 tins of rice, 80kilograms of salt, 20litres of oil and 24kilograms of fish pate and they burnt his house."

Free Burma Rangers, a humanitarian emergency relief organisation working in the area reported that "...the Burma Army attacked Hti Blah village...over 200 people fled their homes and the Burma Army looted and destroyed property in Hti Bla (including the home of one of the FBR medics)."

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Photo - BI

# Border Guard Force a cause of concern for ethnic armies

A leaked CD from the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) regarding their acceptance of their new role in a Border Guard Force shows officers are anxious about what the 'make-over' means for their future and ethnic identity. The CD given to *Inside News* throws some light on their concerns. An officer at the 'closed door' meeting said.

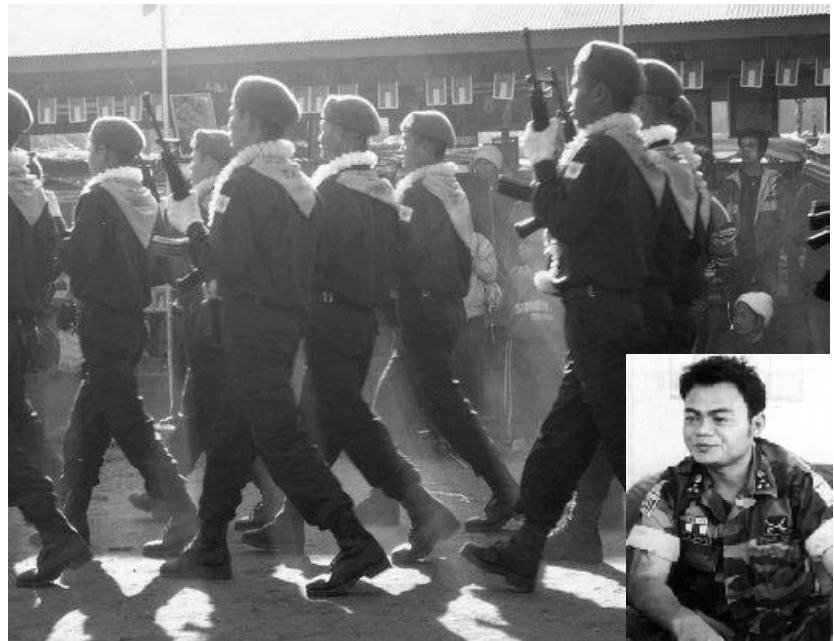
"We, as a Karen armed group, would like to be seen as representing Karen, [but] in BGF, there is no 'K' letter identifying the Karen."

The officer was speaking during a general consultation at an all battalion meeting last year at their base, Shwe Kauko near the Thai-Burma border. Officers expressed concerns that they would now be under the direct control of the Burma Army.

The DKBA was the first large ethnic ceasefire groups to accept the proposal although, as the CD indicates, there are major disagreement among its leaders and their soldiers.

As the regime tries to finalize its BGF in 2010, they are having trouble confirming the exact numbers of troops required for the BGF program.

Other similar dissatisfied sounds are coming from officers of the Karen Peace Force (KPF), a small Karen ceasefire group. An officer was reported as saying that, "The KPF leaders have no option but to agree to the [regime] demands, but many soldiers are not satisfied with this arrangement, because we are under the control



of the Burmese Army, for example the letter 'K' [for Karen] has been removed."

So far, the majority of ethnic ceasefire groups in Burma are not happy with the loss of their ethnic armies and some have had trouble accepting the regimes hard line stance on the issue. When the regime used its soldiers to force the Kokang to accept the BGF many observers felt the cracks in the ethnic ceasefire agreements would be enough to see an alliance form to oppose the regime.

However, there hasn't been any clear move by the regime that they would do the same to others as they did to the Kokang army. Many ethnic armies that initially rejected the proposal have also been willing to negotiate.

Among its opponents is the KNLA/KNU Peace Council, led by former KNLA 7<sup>th</sup> brigade commander General Htin Maung, who rejected the proposal and listed their objections to the BGF.

Their main criticisms are; the BGF is an instrument of the Burmese arm forces, it doesn't guarantee equality and it's a military program that will not lead to peaceful transition to democracy.

The Peace Council also said. "The people of Burma and all the ethnic nationalities are sick and tired of more military programs that are being enforced and which are taking the country nowhere."

The acceptance of the BGF by the DKBA, resulted in reports claiming hundred of soldiers, dissatisfied with the BGF, had deserted and joined the Karen National Union.

One ethnic leader said the regimes divide and rule policy has been a successful one, not only with Karen but also with other ethnic groups in Burma. The ceasefire process always results in surrender of the ethnic group, rather than solving the problem with mutual understanding or agreement for a lasting peace.

# DKBA soldiers burning, looting and stealing

**"They ordered me to get out of my house and they burnt it..."**

The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) operating in Ta Kreh area of Pa-An districts, Karen State are burning villagers' farm huts and destroying their belongings.

Villager, Saw Pa Lu Poe, 70, from P'Nweh Pu village, is one of the thousands of villagers who had fled the Burma army and DKBA attacks.

Saw Pa Lu Poe, didn't want to leave his land and home and thought his age would offer him some protection. He stayed on his farm to harvest his crops and look after his fish pond.

On the morning of the 27 Oct 2009 DKBA 999 battalion Column Commander, Nyein Aung and 15 soldiers came to Saw Pa Lu Poe's farm and burned down his house.

He describes what happened.

"They [DKBA soldiers] accused

me that I was contacting KNLA soldiers after I accepted them at my farm and cooked for them." Saw Pa Lu Poe said that their accusations were false.

"I told them I never meet with KNLA soldiers and they never cross my fields. I am just an ordinary villager working for my life."

The soldiers didn't believe Saw Pa Lu Poe's explanation.

"They ordered me to get out of my house and they burnt it. All of my belongings were destroyed. I have nothing left."

The soldiers didn't stop there.

They also destroyed Pa Lu Poe's fish farm.

"They exploded a bomb in my fish pond that killed all the fish and they took them all. They burnt my farm, all my belongings and ate all my fish."

Saw Kyaw Dah Poe 43, another

villager from Mae La Poe Hta village faced a similar situation.

On 29 Oct 2009 at 5 p.m the DKBA battalion #7 led by Commander Saw La Thein accused Kyaw Dah Poe of contacting the KNLA. Kyaw Dah Poe says. "A few days after the fighting occurred, between the KNLA and DKBA soldiers, the DKBA came to me and accused me of working with the KNLA."

Kyaw Dah Poe said that the soldiers insisted that he knew the KNLA passed through his farm.

"I told the truth that I never had contact with the KNLA. They shouted at me and pull me down to the ground. Then they burnt my farm fields, hut and all belongings in it. They also burnt my corn barns that were full of corn."

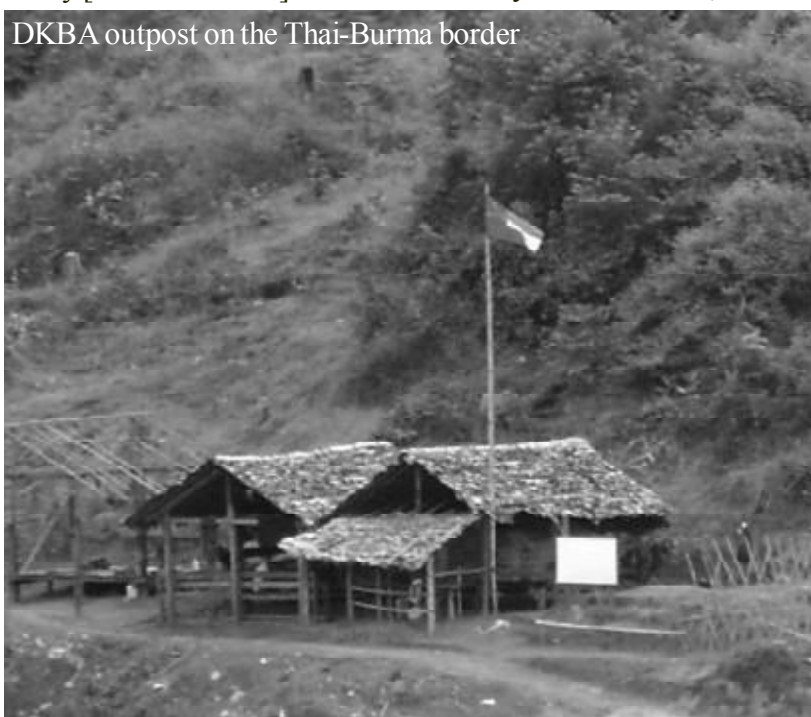
Kyaw Dah Poe said that he was upset but couldn't do anything.

"I was angry looking at the ashes of my belongings, but what can we do?"

The recent attacks against Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) positions in Dooplaya and Pa'an District since the start of 2009, and especially since early June, have attracted the international news agencies. In spite of the international attention the DKBA continues to demand forced labour, looting, arbitrary taxation and other forms of extortion. The Karen Human Right Group reported that with the DKBA's transformation into a Border Guard Force and reported expansion of troop numbers as part of Burma's 2010-election process, such exploitative abuses are likely to remain a problem for civilians in areas of DKBA operations.

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DKBA outpost on the Thai-Burma border





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medicine. I love the trees. It's why I don't get sick. The air is fresh, we like the sound of the river and the birds. The river is good to drink, it's sweet to taste, always cold, fast flowing and straight off the mountain."

Outside his eight-meter by five-meter bamboo house, a pristine river splashes against rocks the size of a small garden shed. Saw Naw Tu says wildlife is abundant. He says signs of wild pigs, wild goats, deer, elephant, tiger, different species of monkey, birds, fish and snakes are all around. But he explains how the Burmese army disrupts the tranquility and any chance of stability he has.

"The Burma army advance and then retreats, each time we hear they are coming we move closer to the [Thai] border. For the moment it's safe, but it's not secure, since last year we had to run three times. The last time was last month. We had to flee at night. We could only take what we could carry - most times you can't take anything."

Saw Naw Tu's home and kitchen is testimony to his and his wife, Waw Lu's ability that they know

how to live off the land. Herbs dry on rafters above an open fire. They are a good combination. Saw Naw Tu is a wealth of knowledge about what plants to eat, trees to use, water to drink, animals to catch and rear and Waw Lu knows how they should be prepared and cooked. Dinner is turtle soup with wild herbs and mushrooms, breakfast is frogs and young tamarind leaves and lunch roast civet. Saw Naw Tu says given the opportunity to grow food without interference he could build homes in his secret valley for 60 households - about 300 people. "When we left our old village we had our cows, buffaloes, pigs and chickens. The soldiers killed them. My old farm was good, good soil, good water. We grew rice. I harvested 400 baskets a year, now I'm lucky to grow seven baskets in a small hideaway plot on the hills out-of-sight of the army."

Waw Lu says proudly that they have six children and 11 grandchildren.

"In our old village all our kids went to school. There's no school here, if kids want to study they have to move to the border."

The FBR team leader is full of admiration for the displaced

villagers resilience and ability to get back on their feet.

"The people's response is to rebuild, if the Burma army stop the attacks and leave the villagers alone they can manage to grow more than enough food, build clinics and schools."

Night bruises the last of the daylight and Saw Naw Tu takes a small tube of bamboo, fills it with tree resin and lights it explaining that it will burn bright for most of the night.

The reality of Saw Naw Tu's daily life reflects the findings in the numerous reports by human rights groups about the harsh life internally displaced people face. In spite of his picturesque surroundings, Saw Naw Tu says his life is insecure, rice is in short supply and he fears the Burmese army. He says the rough terrain and the coming wet season deluge offers some protection for now.

"If we have stability we can build wooden houses, put in irrigation channels and establish orchards and farms. We are capable of looking after ourselves. We can build a village here. The question is how do you stop the Burma army?" *\*Appear in the Bangkok Post*

# Women's group pleads to Thai Government to let Karen refugees stay

Local Thai authorities are pressuring recent refugees, escaping conflict in Burma, to return home. The refugees, now temporarily residing in Tha Song Yang district in Tak province, do not want to go back to Burma, but say local army officials are exerting pressure for them to leave. This is in spite of documented cases of refugee families being sent back to face danger from landmines and being taken as forced laborers by the Burmese army.

In early February, the Karen Woman Organization (KWO) appealed by letter to the Royal Thai government to stop forced repatriation of these refugees as there is no safe place for them to return to.

The letter said that in recent months, five refugees from the area have been injured or killed by landmines when creeping back into Burma to look after livestock they left behind, including a 13-year-old boy whose leg was blown off in August last year, and a woman who was eight months pregnant had her foot blown apart on January 18, 2010.

The KWO fear for the safety of the refugees and ask the Thai government to consider the risks. "The Karen Women Organization is urgently appealing to the Royal Thai Government not to forcibly repatriate over 3,000 Karen refugees..., back to a heavily land-mined war-zone in Burma." The letter highlighted that the

majority of the refugees are women and children.

The Karen Human Right Group (KHRG) in their recent report '*Unsafe Return*' confirmed returning refugees were injured or killed between June 2009 and January 2010. The KHRG report said more refugees are at risk if they are forced back across the border.

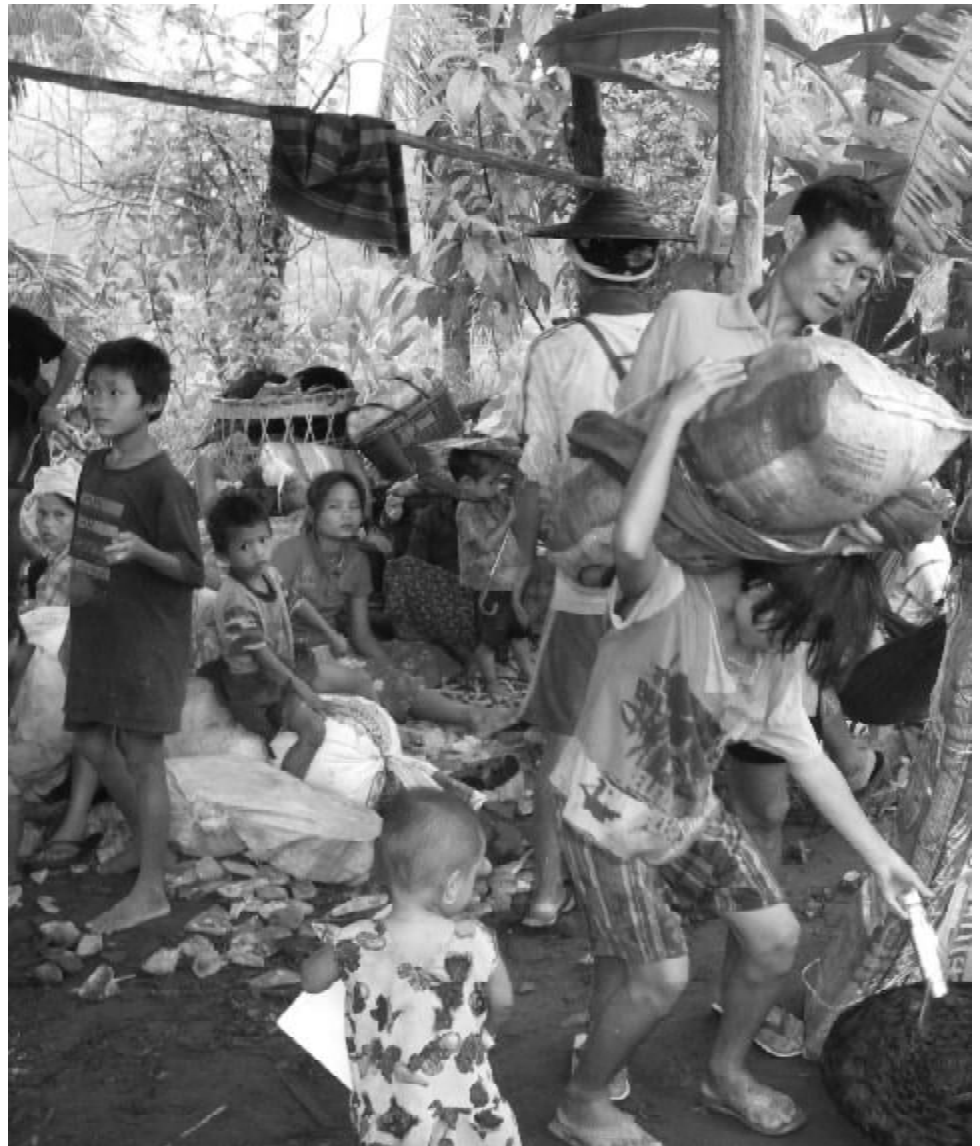
"There is a high probability that more villagers will be killed or

injured if they are forced to return..."

KWO Joint Secretary, Blooming Night Zan was reported in the Karen media as saying.

"The Thai army told the refugees that they will send them back on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February. The area that they are returning to now is land-mined and when groups of people go back, it is risky for their lives.

There is no one taking security for them." [Update: since the time of



writing more than 500 villagers have returned to Karen state] Naw Thoo Lei, a Karen aid worker who is working with the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP) says the situation is complex.

“Everyone wants to return home, they [refugees] all say ‘yes’, but only on the condition that when they do go home it is safe. Refugees say now is not the time. The area is heavily landmined. If these people are sent home now, it can be guaranteed they’ll be back for hospital care in a matter of weeks.”

Naw Thoo Lei says the situation is not safe for refugee to return

home to work the land. “If their farms are land-mined, how are they going to survive.”

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**If their  
farms are land-  
mined, how are  
they going to  
survive**

"

According to people inside the temporary sites, the local authority is trying to stop humanitarian aid, especially food ration, distribution to refugees who are staying out of the sites or are not in their registration list. The local authority regards the aids as a reason the refugees stay in Thailand.

The KHRG report says.

“Services at the camp [temporary site] should not been seen as a pull factor encouraging the refugees to remain in Thailand”.

The report argues.

“...leaving behind their homes, fields and livelihoods, this is not a decision made lightly, particularly for villagers who are primarily subsistence farmers and have an intense connection to their land.”

On 27<sup>th</sup> January representatives from the local Thai authority, UNCHR, TBBC, IRC, US Embassy, KNU, DKBA and temporary sites leaders met to discuss the issue. The local Thai officials made it clear that these new refugees will not be relocated to Mae La refugee camp.

The group agreed that there will be voluntary repatriation for those

who are willing to return and if they can. For those who cannot go back safely alternatives solution will need to be found. At the meeting group failed to identify these solutions.

At the meeting the local Thai military insisted that hundreds of people at Nong Bua sites, one of the three temporary sites, expressed their wish to return to Burma.

In contrast, UNHCR and TBBC said that in their interviews and discussion with the refugees most people were not coming forward to express their wish to return and, in fact most people have been consistently expressing their fear to go back for reasons of landmines, human rights abuses, and lack of access to livelihoods, health care, water and sanitation. Sources from inside the temporary sites also complained that the Thai soldiers are also going house to house urging refugees to says ‘yes’ when they are asked if they want to go back and are making them to want to leave the place.

Blooming Night Zan quoted in the appeal letter said.

“This evidence of people stepping on the landmines is a sure sign that the situation is still very dangerous. Although the Thai government is not a signatory of the Refugee Convention, the KWO is very grateful to His Majesty the Thai King, and the Thai government, for a long history of kindness to refugees. We appeal to the Thai authorities now to show your humanitarian kindness again.”

The KWO is a Karen community based organization working community development works including education, health and cultural promotion and preservation.





## Burma Army destroy village life

Burma Army attacks in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District northern Karen State forced over 1500 villagers into hiding. The attacks came during the rice harvest and as a result, humanitarian organizations warn many of the escaping villagers will face severe food shortages in the coming months.

Free Burma Ranger (FBR), an emergency relief agency reports that the Burma Army is currently attacking villages in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District, Karen State. The Burma Army operations began on 7 October as Light Infantry Battalion 599, Infantry Battalion 73 and 39 left Kwee Di Kaw and Maladaw camps and by 9 October 1500 villagers had been displaced by the attacks.

Reverend Baw Pae, from Nwa Lay Ko village, was among those who escaped and said. "It was raining. Many villagers slept on the ground. A mother who had just given birth under a tree in the rain wanted to light a fire to get warm, but she was afraid the Burmese would see the smoke."

FBR reports say the Burma army fired mortars on villages in the Nwa Lay Ko, Giblayta and Saw Poe Ta areas and 1000's of villagers are hiding in the jungle. Reverend Baw Pae, 58, was shot and wounded by the Burmese army. The Reverend works for the Karen Baptist Convention and is also a farmer. Reverend Baw Pen says.

"By the grace of God I escaped. The Burma Army

attacked us, but everyone, man, woman and child was saved."

Reverend Baw Pae says the soldiers stole his belongings and money. "They took a camera, hammock and net, a radio, my pastor hand book, 8000 kyat and clothes." Reverend Baw Pae says a man from Kyauk Pya tract, K'Pa Hta village was shot on the same day. "Saw Hsaw Oh U, 35, was shot by a soldier from IB 73. He has a family with young children."

Reverend Baw Pae said. "The Burma Army patrolled Moo Township for 10 day, forcing most of the schools to close."

Reverend Baw Pae says soldiers destroyed a villager's farm. "The Burmese soldiers from IB 73 destroyed the crops belonging to Saw K' Pru Htoo."

FBR relief teams said wild animals and soldiers destroyed many of the abandoned farms. The Burma Army destroyed rice fields to erect temporary huts.

On 8th October, the Burma Army came to Tanata village, burning Pastor Paw Pa's house (not his real name) and all his belongings. The next day they burnt down Lah Kwe Moo's house.

Reverend Baw Pae said. "The patrols became are a big problem for civilians. They can't farm and their children can't go to school."