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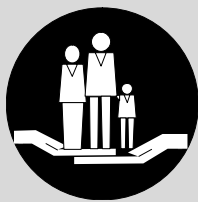
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CRIMES AGAINST THE PEOPLE!

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



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Regime grows fat *as the people starve*

Crimes against the people of Burma are well documented. There are many credible reports by international and local organizations such as the New York based Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the Karen Human Rights Group who have collected thousands of cases of criminal acts conducted by the Burmese regime and their military against the Burmese people.

The humanitarian aid delivery group, the Thai Burma Border Consortium has estimated that as many as 3,500 villages in Eastern Burma have been 'forcibly relocated or otherwise abandoned between 1996 and 2007'. The International Labor Organisation has reported on the millions of Burmese workers who leave Burma because they can no longer afford to live there. Yet, the regime collects billions of dollars each year in oil and energy revenue from companies and governments only too willing to trade with the regime --- in spite of the regime being regarded as one of the world's most corrupt. Most of this revenue is shared among the generals. A paltry sum is spent of health care while nearly 50 per cent of the budget is spent on the military.

This issue of *Inside News* investigates and interviews a miniscule number of local people who are the victims of the regimes acts of terror. Yet their stories give a telling insight into how rotten the regime is.

In June 2009, the Human Rights Clinic at the Harvard Law School released its report, Crimes in Burma. Writing in the report, Justice Richard, J, Goldstein, a former judge at the International Criminal Court for the former Yugoslavia called on the UN Security to act on Burma. So far his petition has fallen on deaf ears. The people of Burma still wait for the regimes shackles to be lifted. Only then will Burma and its people be able to harvest the massive natural resources for their own benefit. Until then they can only stand by and watch the generals live out decadent lifestyles while filling their overseas bank accounts with their ill-gotten wealth stolen from the people of Burma.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

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

Crimes in Karen State

“If I join the DKBA, I will be helping them fight my own Karen people.”

Thousands of Karen villagers continue to suffer as the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) tries to control Karen communities.

Eh Htoo (not real name), story is not an isolated incident, but part of the Burmese governments widespread use of war crimes and crimes against humanity to intimidation to control ethnic groups in Burma.

Eh Htoo spoke to *Inside News*’ Reporter Saw Ropran in a village on the Thai Burma border. Eh Htoo is taking temporary refuge together with 300 villagers who escape the Burmese and DKB Armies.

Recruitment

Karen villagers in Dooplaya and Pa’an districts fled DKBA plans to forcibly recruit 3,000 villagers as soldiers.

“I was not only escaping forced recruitment and forced labor, I was escaping extortion. The DKBA soldiers demanded money from our villagers. They demand our chickens, pigs, oil and fish paste.”

Eh Htoo, a farmer from Maw Kee village says he already escaped recruitment three times. “We run for our life every time the DKBA

soldiers come to our village and attack us, or force us to work or fight for them.”

In the first week of August 2009, DKBA soldiers entered Eh Htoo’s village on a fed recruitment drive.

“We ran, the DKBA were shooting at us. Thank God, no one was killed.”

According to a recent report by the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), forced recruitment by the DKBA is on the rise. The report says.

“Struggling to find sufficient numbers of volunteer soldiers, the DKBA has been ordering villages to provide recruits or pay large sums to hire substitutes.

Eh Htoo confirms the KHRG findings.

“They [DKBA] ordered one person in each household to join their army. Otherwise, we were forced to pay 500,000 kyat as a fine,” says Eh Htoo. “If I join the DKBA, I will be helping them fight my own Karen people.” Like Eh Htoo many villagers have no money, and are forced to fight or flee to Thailand. Eh Htoo says.

“I decided I would escape from recruitment. Every time the soldiers come to our village I run away.” says Eh Htoo. The DKBA broke-away from the Karen

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Photo:Irrawaddy

National Union (KNU) in 1994. The KNU, and their military wing the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) have been fighting the Burmese government for autonomy for over sixty years. Although their fighting force is less than 5,000 troops the KNU remain defiant. General Htee Moo, Headquarter Column Commander for KNLA's 6th Brigade told *Inside News*.

"The KNLA is strong, our villagers and soldiers love and stand by us. Our revolution will not end easy."

Many villagers, like Eh Htoo who fled, hide in the jungle shelters, reluctant to abandon their farms. They survive on handouts from aid groups. Eh Htoo says they sleep on the ground and under trees. They have little food, and no access to medical facilities.

"It's not easy to live under the trees in the rainy season. If we stay in our village we will not be able to grow enough food to survive. We will continue to be forced to work. I will help work for our community from the outside."

DKBA soldiers caught one villager, Saw Oo Thin Kywet. He was beaten until his ribs were broken. Eh Htoo explains that the DKBA considers Oo Thin Kywet an escapee, therefore his son would be forced to work on his behalf.

"He didn't want his son to porter

for the DKBA, so the next day all the family fled."

In 1995 the DKBA signed a ceasefire agreement with Burma's ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1995. Their attacks on the KNU have intensified this year as the DKBA prepare to become a 'Border Guard Force' in return for control of villages, logging and other trade concessions.

"It's not easy to stay under the tree on the ground in the rainy season..."

The KHRG report tells the story of a DKBA deserter. "A few days after I escaped....my 19-year-old son was arrested to replace me. He was sent to a DKBA military camp. My son was arrested because I had fled from the military. Since I wasn't going to go back, he had to replace me to serve as a soldier."

KHRG reports that another 119 villagers fled recruitment in Pa'an District. They found temporary shelter at Ler Per Her camp for internally displaced persons on the Thai Burma border.

However, their peace was shattered on June 6th, they were attacked by Burmese army and DKBA soldiers and forced to

move once again. According to a report in *The Bangkok Post* 1,300 government troops attacked Ler Per Her displacement camp, on the Burmese side of the River Moei. Some 3,295 people escaped into Thailand as soldiers started the bombardment of the camp. According to *The Bangkok Post*. "Before Burmese soldiers left Ler Per Her, they booby-trapped and land-mined walkways; water-holes, rice stores, schoolyards and homes, making the old village uninhabitable [Bangkok Post]."

Forced Labor & Human Shields

In early August 2009, DKBA soldiers illegally crossed into Thailand and forced two Karen villagers back to the DKBA camp in Burma. When the Thai army heard of the cross border intrusion, they took immediate action to catch them before they crossed back into Burma. One of the villagers was held hostage in the DKBA camp, while the other was ordered back to Thailand to buy supplies on the condition that if he escaped, the DKBA would kill his friend.

According to Eh Htoo.

"The villager was afraid of the DKBA soldiers so he went to buy supplies for them - that evening the two villagers were released and allowed to return to their homes."



Many of the escaped villagers with Eh Htoo have already worked for the DKBA as porters. Forced to carry ammunition, supplies and to help build army camps. Eh Htoo says the DKBA also use villagers as human shields.

“When we carry their bullets and guns we walk in front. When the DKBA’s is attacked their soldiers take cover in [fox] holes. They don’t us in the hole.”

Eh Htoo’s friend, Saw Kyaw Win, was forced to porter army supplies for the DKBA. Eh Htoo says.

“Soldiers beat him on the legs. His wife was pregnant. Saw Kyaw Win is from my village. With 10 of his friends they escaped. Some have resettled in Thailand. Saw Kyaw Win got treatment for his injuries at Mae Sot Hospital.”

KHRG and international

organizations campaigning to ban landmines have also documented the extensive use of human minesweepers by the Burmese Army.

“More and more people are being taken for forced de-mining who are prisoners. In a suspected mine area, they [the regime] will take these people and they will march them ahead of military units to detonate any mines that may be there,” says Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwan, a researcher with Landmine Monitor on Burma.

Food Shortage

Extortion demands placed on villagers by the Burmese army and the DKBA means many farmers find it difficult to work. Many fields are land mined. When there is land to farm, villagers say they are constantly being forced to work for the

armies and are unable to find the time to work their own fields. At harvest, the DKBA take their cut. “We are forced to pay taxes just to farm our own land,” says Eh Htoo. “For a big garden we pay 700 baht each year, and a small garden we pay 500 baht to the DKBA soldiers. Even if we don’t have a harvest, we still have to pay. If we don’t have the money to pay, the next year we will have to pay 3000 baht. We pay 100 baht to the DKBA soldiers each tin of corn, (about 17 kilograms), we plant. If we plant more we have to pay more.”

Villagers are further taxed according to their production. “We also have to give them part of our harvest, and then pay an extra 10 baht for each tin of corn we harvest.”

DKBA Makes Civilians pay

“They beat me with sticks and kicked me with their boots.”

--- Saw Bu Hei, tortured by the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army.

The DKBA sponsored allies of the Burmese regimes State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) have been documented by many human rights groups for committing countless abuses – torture, extortion, rape, destruction of properties, excessive taxation and forced recruitment – against their own people.

One early morning on the April 4th, 2009, Saw Bu Hei, 40, was helping his grandfather build a new house when he was detained by a group of DKBA soldiers from Battalion #907. He was tied up with rope, handcuffed and then the soldiers started beating him.

“I said why beat me like this? What have I done wrong to you.” Saw Bu Hei scowled as he recalled standing-up to the soldiers. “They shut me up and told me not to talk anymore.”

Saw Bu Hei is from Mae Pleh village in Kyain Township, Dooplaya District. He has a wife and six children. He says he is an ordinary slash and burn farmer. But he was accused by the DKBA of



Saw Bu Hei whose rib was broken

having contact with the Karen National Union (KNU) and hiding weapons for them.

“The soldiers told me ‘show us [the KNU weapons] now. Give them to us.’ But, I told them I am an ordinary villager.” Saw Bu Hei said the Commander, Pha Htaw (aka – Saw Nyunt Shwe), got angry and the beating got harder. “He hit me twice with the butt of his rifle and then pained his pistol at me”.

Saw Bu Hei says the Commander insisted he had KNLA weapons, but Bu Hei stuck to his story. When Saw Bu Hei’s wife pleaded for his release, the Commander

slapped her twice.

When the soldiers realized that Saw Bu Hei did not have any guns, they fined him the cost of the weapons they claimed he had. “I was fined and forced to give 400,000 Kyats but I didn’t have that amount of money.”

With help from the village headman, he borrowed money from other villagers and paid the fine. Saw Bu Hei’s voice sunk into sadness, “they released me when I paid the money.”

Now deep in debt, with a broken rib, six kids and a wife, Saw Bu Hei he struggles to make ends meet.

Uncertain Lives

Internally displaced people from Taungoo district live in constant fear. They are afraid to travel, to go to their farms, gardens and homes. The Burmese army treat them as an enemy in their own land. When the Burmese troops patrol in Taungoo, they burn houses, villages and destroy crops and gardens.

Villagers are shot on sight on sight. Villagers live on the run, too afraid to settle and live for long in the same place. They live without schools for their children and are unable to grow enough food for their families.

A CIDKP field worker, Saw Ba Blut in Taungoo district says.

"Villagers earn their living by farming and [market] gardening. The Burmese army destroyed all their gardens; they burnt their cardamom trees, cut down their betal nut trees, as well as their durian, mango and coffee plantations."

The field worker Saw Ba Blut says people live in jungle hiding places don't have a good land to farm. "They have to grow their crops in dark forests on rocky mountain soil."

Saw Ba Blut says rice harvests are small and many people don't have enough to feed their family.

"Some have very small farms and they can't go back and look after them [because of the soldiers]. Many [neglected] orchards don't produce good fruit anymore."

Saw Ba Blut says villagers need all the food they can get.

"People sneak back to their gardens and work without letting anybody see them. They work in fear. They get some produce and they try to sell them in nearby villages of Kler La and Kaw Thay Der."



Saw Ba Blut says villagers try to make bamboo mats to sell or trade for rice.

"Even though they have their own farms, they dare not to go back and work their own land. They have to take low paying jobs in villages."

Saw Ba Blut says villagers living in the jungle have only what they can carry.

"Their clothes are worn out. They

don't have enough blankets and mosquito nets so many people get sick from the cold, malaria, and diarrhea."

Saw Ba Blut says Lighting a fire attracts soldiers who fire mortar shells at their hideouts. They worry soldiers will hear their children crying, or their chickens or dogs barking.

"If the Burmese troops see villagers, they just shoot at them without question. Villagers worry about traveling in case army patrols see them or they will step on landmines."

Saw Ba Blut says internally displaced people have to hide in the forests and building and running schools is difficult.

"They don't have enough text books, pencils, pens, blackboards and chalk. When the soldiers come to the area people have to run and try to move the school."

Saw Ba Blut says there are two townships in Taungoo district and the population of displaced people is about 15,000.

According to a TBBC report (2009), an estimated 66,000 people were forced to leave their homes as a result of, or in order to avoid, the effects of armed conflict and human rights abuses during the past year.

Food Shortage in Mu Traw

We cook rice porridge with bamboo shoots, we can't afford nutritious food.

Internally displaced Karen people in the Papun areas of Mu Traw, eastern Burma are suffering severe food shortages due to attacks by Burmese soldiers and an increase in militarization. In Pla Kho and Yeh Mu Plaw villages, Lu Thaw townships about 4,000 villagers are constantly on the move to escape government soldiers.

Poe Cho, a relief worker from the Karen Office of Relief and Development (KORD) and an *Inside News* contributor finds out

why Karen farmers are unable to work their land.

“We dare not go to our fields since the Burmese army set up road blocks and guard their roads,” explains farmer Naw Thu Poe, 35. “They shell mortars into the surrounding area. If they see us, they shoot us.”

Naw Thu Poe lives in Baw Lu Der village; an area the regime calls a ‘black zone’ or ‘free fire zone’, where a ‘shoot on sight’ policy is applied. The regime divides areas

into zones; ‘white zones’ are totally under state control, while ‘brown zones’ have a ‘mixed administration’. The ‘black zone’ is regarded by the regime as under the control of armed resistant groups, but many displaced villagers continue to hide in these areas. In these zones, there is no distinguish drawn between civilians and rebels. Ordinary villagers are often shot by the Burmese soldiers without questions.

The Burmese 323rd Infantry Battalion (IB), set up camp in Lu Thaw Township of Mu Traw (Papun) District. Witnesses claim they have been shelling mortars indiscriminately into surrounding villages, farms and plantations. Villagers, to avoid have left their farms and villages are now close to the army camp and hide in the jungle.

Pho Cho says while villagers are hiding from Burmese army fixed positions, they put themselves at risk from army patrols. The troops of the 383rd and 384th Infantry Battalion patrol at random while sending supplies to the front lines where they attack displaced civilian populations.

“They patrol the transport routes and fire into our villages,” says Naw Thu Poe. Poe Ch says as a result, villagers in the area cannot harvest their rice and collect their crops. *Continue to page (9)*



“The Burmese army has occupied the fertile lands where we used to farm. Now we never grow enough food,” says Naw Thu Poe.

According to the Thailand-Burma Border Consortium’s annual IDP survey, nearly half a million people

are internally displaced in eastern Burma, either in government relocation sites, within non-state armed groups ceasefire zones, or in so-called freefire areas highly vulnerable to Tatmadaw [SPDC] patrols that maintain an unlawful “shoot on sight” policy against civilians.

Poe Cho says during the regime’s ‘scorched earth’ offensive in 1994-

1997 where they aggressively burned down villages, destroyed crops and livestock, civilians from Pla Kho and Yeh Mu Plaw village tracts (a collection of villages) were forced from their homes. Their lands got smaller and soil less fertile as farmers had to adapt to growing on steep jungle hillsides. “We have to find new methods of farming,” says Kler Say, 36 a local official working for the Karen

National Union’s organizing department. “If we use the same traditional methods of farming we will face more problems with food security.”

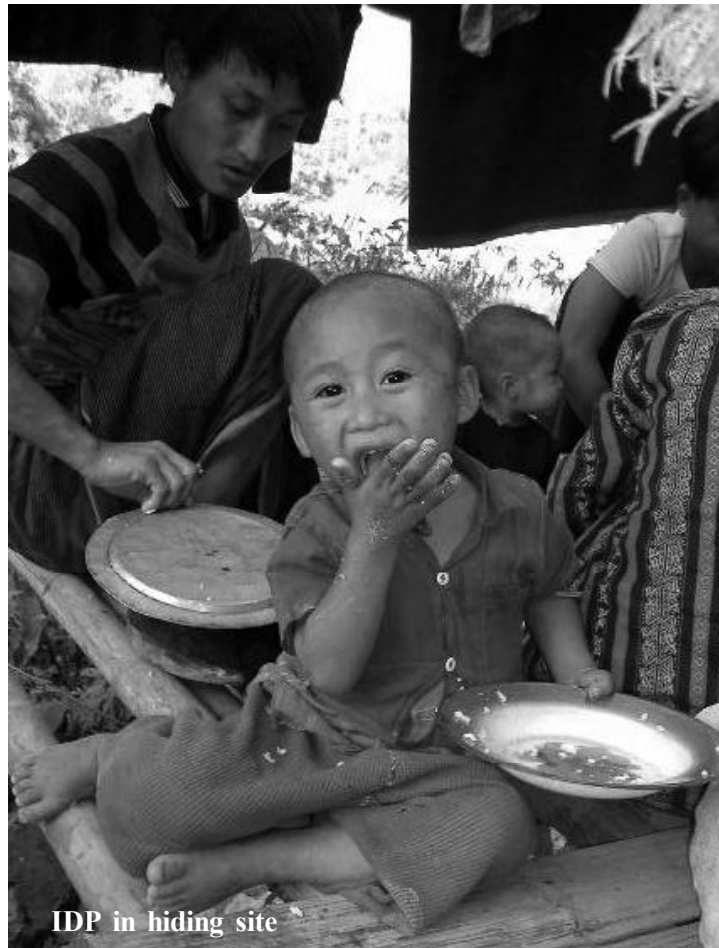
Kler Say says that unusual weather conditions and crop destruction by

displaced civilians and they rely on eating bamboo shoots and other food sources that they can collect in the jungle for their survival,” says However, villagers face being caught, arrested and even killed while traveling to their farms or foraging the jungles for food.

Like many other displaced Karen farmers Naw Thu Poe says she has had trouble finding food to feed her family.

“We boil rice or we cook rice porridge with bamboo shoots. We can’t afford nutritious food.”

The Karen Human Right Group reports that, “the specter of ongoing [Burmese] army patrols and potential reoccupation of abandoned camps



IDP in hiding site

pests is also having an impact on Karen farmers ability to grow enough food to survive. The lack of available land and increase in Burmese army activities has driven the local population close to starvation. Saw Steve, Secretary of Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP) says.

“Food shortage is a serious problem among internally

continues to limit villagers’ abilities to access and maintain farmland. This risks repeating cycles of food shortages.”

Kler Say added that the most important thing is to stop the militarization of the people, otherwise the problems will continue.

“Villagers want the fighting to stop. If not, the suffering of our people will go on.” ■ ■ ■

DKBA: High Taxes and Extortion

“They came to my house and pointed their guns at me, they demanded all my food and alcohol worth 2700 baht,” says Saw Wah.

Burmese soldiers came to Pu Kler village twelve years ago and burnt it to the ground. Saw Wah (not real name) escaped with his other villagers to the Burmese side of the Thai Burma border in search of safety. *Inside News* reporter, Ropran, accompanied a humanitarian mission, taking rice to the Karen villagers. He spoke with Saw Wah.

“I thought I would be safe from Burmese soldiers attacks and from forced labor, but I was not safe,” says Saw Wah. “I now have to face another group, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA).”

Saw Wah’s adopted village is a Thai village sitting directly on the Burma border. Intermingled with the local Thai Karen population

are the houses of displaced Karen people from Burma. The villagers farm corn and chili to earn a living. Saw Wah sat on the bamboo floor. At 23 years his youthful face shows a lifetime of abuse. As a child he survived Burmese army attacks, and now he lives under the DKBA soldiers command. The DKBA signed a cease-fire agreement with the Burmese government in 1995. Since then, they have committed countless crimes against their own people; including torture, rape, extortion and slavery.

“They came to my house and pointed their guns at me, they demanded all my food and alcohol worth 2700 baht,” says Saw Wah. On the hilltop just above Saw Wah’s village sits Lay Tar Thoo, the DKBA’s 907th battalion camp under the command of captain Saw Than Toe. DKBA soldiers regularly enter the village to recruit workers and demand money, food and alcohol.

Saw Wah wishes to leave, but his wife is reluctant to give up their farm.

“The DKBA wanted our buffalos, so they placed land mines in my field. My two buffalos trod on



Saw Wah who witnesses the abuses

their land mines.” Saw Wah was ordered to pay a fine of 2000 baht for damaging military equipment. “I didn’t have money to pay, but, I told them to take my buffalos, they are injured, but you can still sell them,” he said, lamenting at the loss of the livestock.

“Everybody who has a tractor in my village has to pay a tax to the DKBA. The cost for a tractor is 500 baht each year. Some of the people don’t have the money to pay on time, so they are fined 5000 baht a tractor. If we still can’t pay they take our tractor”.

Extortion and arbitrary taxation are wide spread in Karen State. According to the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), in Pa’an district, Northern Karen State the DKBA have placed taxes on the production of charcoal. In early 2009, “Maung Chit Thoo, commander of DKBA Special Battalion of Brigade #999, had soldiers under his command distribute photos of himself and his wife to villagers living in T’Nay Hsah Township – the villagers were forced to buy them at a cost of 2,000 kyat (US \$2.03) each,” says a KHRG report. KHRG believes these trends are likely to continue well after the 2010 election. “The DKBA has been able to ensure its long-term political future in Burma by transforming itself

into a ‘Border Security Force’, a title that would nominally place the group within the SPDC hierarchy.” However, many observers believe that it will solidify the DKBA’s positions in the border region of Karen state allowing them to control illegal trade routes and increase the burden on local communities to support their military and business activities.

In Eh Htoo’s village, the DKBA commander told the villagers they

“They came to my house and pointed their gun at me, they demanded all my food...”

would all need travel permits, and then charged each villager 100 baht for the documents. “If they see us in the street, they will check our travel documents card. If we don’t have documents, they will order us to follow them until they finish patrolling,” says Saw Wah. Saw Wah has also been forced to carry military supplies three times

this year for the DKBA. “The captain came to my home and pointed his gun at me, and ordered me to carry 3 tins of rice to the Thai Burma border. The next time they came, [commander] Saw Than Toe ordered me, to carry alcohol, cement and water pipes for them. Every time when we go to porter they only want us to work at night because they don’t want the KNLA to see them.”

“Earlier this year they came to my village and demanded 20 people to go with them and porter,” Says Saw Mya Toe, also from Eh Htoo’s village. “They ordered us to carry ammunitions, supplies from Saw Plaw village to The Htoo Kyoe, Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) camp. Some of the villagers [porters] were very old men. When we got close to the KNLA camp, the 907th DKBA battalion under commander Saw Kyaw Hla Poe started fighting with the KNLA. One of the villagers, Saw Pha Haw, 47 was hit in the jaw by a stray bullet.” Saw Mya Toe was ordered to look after Pha Haw until they returned to the DKBA camp in K’Law Gaw Poe village. Pha Haw never received medical treatment. “Saw Pha Haw’s older brother had to come and rescue him from the DKBA camp. He was very brave and snuck his injured brother out at night,” says Mya Toe.

Attacks in Ler Doh Soe Township *Megui-Tavoy District*

“Whenever their troops are injured in battle, they call up the villagers to carry them from where the fighting took place,” says Plot So Win.

Continued violence in Le Doh Soe Township, causes more civilian deaths, forced labor and food shortages.

Many Karen villages have been forcibly relocated by the Burmese army and are now being forced to carry supplies and wounded soldiers for the Burmese army. Recent fighting between the KNLA and Burmese army has increased the government’s use of civilian forced labor.

The Burmese army’s 25th Infantry Battalion (IB) led by Ko Ko Lwin called on three civilians from Kaw Pauh village on June 26. Saw Poe Thet, Saw Shwe Tay and Saw Gaw Dee were ordered to follow Ko Ko Lwin and his men. They were forced to go as guides and carry their supplies.

The three civilian-workers accompanied the Battalion against their will. When fighting erupted two days later between Burmese soldiers and the KNLA in Htaw Klo, Saw Poh Thet was killed. Saw Shwe Tay and Saw Gaw Dee survived, sustaining injuries. The Burmese army commanders did not allow them to be taken to

hospital. 7 Burmese soldiers were also killed, and 7 wounded.

“This happens continuously in this area,” says Plot So Win, Ler Doh Soe Township officer. On June 29th, the Burmese soldiers called upon another 18 civilians from 9 different villages including



relocation villages in K’Moe Thway area to carry the wounded. On July 4th, the 25th Infantry Battalion and the 267th demanded 100 villagers - 10 people from 10 villages. The village headmen were ordered to accompany the civilian workers to Taw Tho Loe, a large relocation site under Burmese army control. The Burmese army soldiers also demanded a truck

from Wa Shu Kho to carry soldiers. Villagers were not allowed to use the truck, but had to carry the wounded on foot.

“Villagers have to work again and again for the Burmese army. They don’t have enough time to work their own farms and are facing food shortages.” Plot So Win, estimates that fighting between the Burmese army and KNLA has broken out at least

15 times this year, both in his township and the surrounding area.

“Even if they do grow rice, because of the Burmese army activities they can’t get access to their farms,” says Saw Steve, Secretary of the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP). “Sometimes, wild animals destroy their crops. Other times the Burmese army, walk across the paddy field and just pull and destroy their rice. The Burmese army also plant landmines everywhere so villagers are scared to travel.”

According to Human Rights Watch, The Burmese military continues to attack civilians in ethnic conflict areas, particularly in Karen State and Shan State. Abuses such as forced labor,

sexual violence against women, extrajudicial killings, torture and beatings, and confiscation of land and property are wide spread throughout Karen State.

IDP's who escaped forced relocation and are hiding in the jungle have to pick up their lives and move again, fearing another Burmese army assault. Food shortages are common as the IDP's in hiding are forced to live on the run. They have no stability and lack adequate security to farm. "Because of the fighting villagers are scattered in different places," says Plot So Win.

While many Karen have crossed into Thailand and become refugees, others are reluctant to give up the land they have farmed for generations. "They stay and suffer working under very poor conditions," says Saw Steve. "If they go to Thailand, they will have to beg from others to survive."

In January the combined forces of the 25th and 103rd IB, along with the 433rd Light Infantry Battalion set up base in Ko Hsay Hta, an abandoned village in the K'Moe Thway area. They ordered villagers from their homes to the relocation sites under Burmese army control. Crowded conditions make farming difficult and food scarce. Since the arrival of the Burmese army in January, civilian movement has been restricted. Villagers have not been

allowed to cross to the eastern side of K'Moe Thway River. "They have to stay in the relocation site," says Plot So Win. "They are not allowed across the river even to look after their farms. Whenever they [army] go on patrol, they force at least two villagers to go with them."

Saw Doe Lo, was ordered by Burmese army Battalion Commander, Soe Aung Myo, to go his village and get some chicken for the soldiers' meal. After collecting the chickens, Saw Doe Lo was shot by a Burmese army soldier. He was shot five times when the village headman appeared and convinced the soldiers to let him live. The commander did not allow Saw

Doe Lo to be taken to the hospital. Instead, he demanded 5000 Baht from each household in Kler Poo village to treat him there.

According to the Thailand-Burma Border Consortium's annual survey, nearly half a million people are internally displaced in eastern Burma, either in government relocation sites, within non-state armed groups ceasefire zones, or in so-called free-fire areas highly vulnerable to Burmese army patrols that maintain an unlawful "shoot on sight" policy against civilians.

"The country will not develop with civil wars. We dream to have freedom but we don't have it yet so our people suffer like this," says Plot So Win.



A relocation village in Megui-Tavoy District

Systematic Rape of Karen Women Continue Unpunished:

“Torture and rape in Burma is increasing. The shame is often too much for women to talk about,”

In 2004 Karen Women's Organization (KWO) launched, *Shattering Silence*, followed by *State of Terror* in 2007. These reports document the widespread and systematic use of rape by the Burmese military against Karen women, demonstrating how rape is used as a military strategy to “intimidate, control, shame and ethnically cleanse Karen groups in Burma”.

Reporter, **Eray John** from *Inside*

News investigates and finds little has changed for women caught in the crossfire.

“After drinking in one village, he took the local teacher, Naw Paw See (not her real name), ordered her to strip and proceeded to rape her,” says a recent Free Burma Rangers (FBR) report that documents the crimes of Commander Khin Maung Hsit.

Maung Hsit took control of Military Operations Command 5

(MOC5) in Kler La, Toungoo District on August 15th. He also raped Naw Eh Hla, after forcing her to drink alcohol and give him a massage.

Soldiers under the command of MOC5 from the 544th Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) raped Naw Eh Wa and Naw Blu Paw, both from villages in the area of Kler La. All though their crimes are well documented Khin Maung Hsit and his soldiers continue to act with impunity in “violating and abusing the residents of Kler La.”

These are some of the hundreds of reported incidents of sexual violence against ethnic women in Burma that have been gathered by human rights and humanitarian groups. The total number of rape crimes documented as of 2007, from Chin, Shan, Karen, Mon and Kachin states was 1,859.

Documentation continues today, and many believe sexual violence against women in Burma is on the rise. “Torture and rape in Burma is increasing. The shame is often too much for women to talk about,” says Gay Shee,



Photo:FBR

spokesperson for KWO. “Soldiers who have raped them scare them. They tell them if they talk, they will rape other women. The women are worried if they speak more women will suffer. They worry for their parents and siblings...soldiers may come back and hurt them.”

In a report dated July 15th, 2009, the United Nations expressed concern at the high number of violent sex crimes committed against rural ethnic women by members of the armed forces “and at the apparent impunity of the perpetrators.”

“In Myanmar, women and girls are fearful of working in the fields or traveling unaccompanied, given regular military checkpoints where they are often subject to sexual harassment... Although there has been documentation and identification of military personnel who have committed sexual violence, including relevant dates and battalion numbers, disciplinary or criminal action is yet to be taken against the alleged perpetrators,” says the UN report.

“Rape is very common in Karen State, whenever soldiers enter a village and see a pretty girl they want. Women are afraid to travel alone in the jungle,” says Gay Shee. “Sometimes the top brass generals will just move the soldiers guilty of rape to another camp, they never punish their soldiers for

human right crimes.”

On August 7th, the Women’s League of Burma (WLB) along with sixty-four other women’s organizations sent a letter to the Secretary General and members of the United Nations Security Council calling for the “prosecution of Senior General Than Shwe at the International Criminal Court (ICC), and an immediate end to the longstanding impunity that has been afforded to the brutal military junta in Burma.” WLB believes that an action to bring the top leader Than Shwe before the International Criminal

**Commander
Khin Maung Hsit
ordered the
teacher to strip
and then raped
her.**

Court would be the beginning of ending the system of impunity in Burma. Their letter to the Secretary General called for the Security Council to live up to its responsibility of protecting civilians against war crimes and crimes against humanity. “It is time for the UNSC to invoke its Responsibility to Protect mechanism, to impose an arms embargo on the regime and establish a commission of inquiry to investigate crimes against humanity in Burma.”

However, the UN is unable to reach a unified platform on dealing with Burma's military regime. Despite supporting a UN doctrine of intervention, giving the international community the responsibility to intervene in cases of genocide, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and war crimes, China and Russia, both permanent members of the Security Council continue to block even strongly-worded statements of condemnation against Burma’s rulers.

Meanwhile, Burmese women, men and children continue to suffer as the Junta carries out a long list of documented crimes against their own people. Women’s groups such as KWO and WLB continue to document these crimes and campaign to punish the regime and bring justice for the women of Burma.

WLB documented the story of a 22-year old woman who was gang raped while pregnant. “Burma Army soldiers killed her father in January 2008, the whole family escaped from their village in Northern Shan State. And then fled to an IDP camp along the Thai-Burma border. She said, “Soldiers came and demanded that my father should let me go with them again...the soldier shot at him. I saw my father fall and die.”

Giving Karen Woman a Chance

The Karen Women's Organization has started a special school to train young Karen women's to be community leaders.

The Karen Women's Organization has started the Karen Youth Women Leadership School (KYWLS) to train and promote women leaders.

Inside News contributor, Hser Hser, takes a look at the role of women in the Karen community, and what is being done to promote inclusion in the decision making process.

While the Karen community in eastern Burma has seen a lot of highly respected women leaders, they continue to have their basic human rights stripped away. Not only from the presence of an invading army, which systematically rapes, tortures, murders and enslaves Karen women, but by unequal political representation, employment and education opportunities in their own communities.

The International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), sees women's full participation in this decision making processes as critical from the "perspectives of human rights, democratic representation, and sound outcomes that reflect the needs,

priorities and contributions of women and men."

"Even though women have the ability to do many things in the community, they lack the confidence. We need more participation from women, especially youth. We hope to meet this need by having this school," says Naw Ta M'La Saw, KWO joint secretary and KYWLS project coordinator.

Photo: KWO



The 14-month training program aims to develop skills for young women in leadership and management as well as improve students understanding of women's rights, politics, and national and international issues. The school

also encourages and creates new ideas for women's development.

An American volunteer at the school sees the program as being adept at turning shy girls into confident and capable women. "Graduates of the program who work at KWO and in the community present themselves as knowledgeable professionals, which contrasted strongly with the shy, hesitant students I met at the school. In the three months I was there, I saw a significant change in student confidence levels."

KYWLS focuses on young women inside Karen state with little or no opportunity to further their education. Ta M'La Saw explains whom the school is for.

"We select the most enthusiastic young women who will be committed to work for the community, we mostly encourage people from inside. We take 25 women on average each year."

The school also takes students from refugee camps along the border in Thailand but places are limited to those who will work for



Photo:KWO

KYWLS students on Martyrs' day

the community. “We decided that those who plan to resettle would not be accepted because they will not be able to work with communities inside Karen State.” During the course, students are expected to spend three months as practical interns working on community development. “Almost everyone who has finished the school is working in their community.”

Increasing numbers of students and applicants demonstrates a success, but the lack of qualified teachers is struggling to meet student demands. “Our students

are increasing each year but our teachers are decreasing. There are only three teachers who teach full-time,” says Ta M’ La Saw. The problem of losing people to resettlement is very serious. This year there are 30 students, which is more than they have ever had. “There were four teachers when I started but one of them resettled to Canada in August, so now we have three full time teachers and some teachers have to teach subjects that they are not experts in, such as English,” said a KWO

volunteer from the USA. The school began in 2001, and is located in section 7a of Mae Ra Maluang refugee camp. So far 146 women have graduated.

Naw Ku Kler Moo, 23, from brigade 6 Kawkerick Township, Kyaw Hta village is KYWLS graduate. She says the course was empowering and has increased her opportunities. “I have learned many things and have a greater understanding about politics and rights. After I passed KYWLS I went to work in Dooplaya district KWO office. I spent time looking after the dormitory [at the school] inside Karen State. I aim to work with my community so Karen women can know about their rights.”

The IWDA sees the exclusion of women and girls from literacy and basic education increases their vulnerability to social marginalization and gender-based violence. “Each additional year of education increases the likelihood that a woman will have more power and control over her reproductive life, better negotiating power within her family and community and improved health outcomes.”

The school also reinforces the idea that women are strong by encouraging physical activity among students. The students exercise every morning, play volleyball, badminton, and football.

TIMBER FOR SALE!

For many Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) soldiers, army life is a business opportunity. After a DKBA attack in April 2009 the cornfields of Kaw Sher and Ker Law Gaw villages in Dooplaya District were destroyed. Many of the residents had no alternative but turn back to the DKBA for employment. Company Commander, Chang Lon, of the DKBA battalion 907, ordered the residents to log the surrounding forests.

Villagers are forced to sell their timber to Chang Lon, who also taxes anyone logging, and confiscates their monthly timber harvest when they are unable to pay.

“The DKBA orders us to log, because when we log they fine us taxes. Every month I pay 20,000 baht and sometimes 30,000. I lost 80,000 baht because the DKBA burned all my timber when they attacked,” says a villager from Dooplaya district, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

With no means to grow enough food to survive, villagers have been forced into logging, as much by force as necessity.

“Villagers don’t have any work to provide food for their family so they log for the DKBA,” says Saw Htee Ku, Warrant Official of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) battalion 201. “Villagers can barely make enough money to survive, but work out of fear of



photo:KESAN

season for log

the DKBA and try to pay their taxes every month.”

A recent Earth Rights International report says “the DKBA, an armed militia group aligned to the SPDC, has increased its military activities significantly in recent months. It is believed that the SPDC is using the DKBA to take control of areas rich in natural resources for logging and mining interests.”

Plans are moving ahead for the DKBA to assume the



Burma's forest

responsibility of the SPDC’s border guard force. Many believe that as the border guard force, the DKBA will control the illegal trade routes, furthering their hunger for logging and resource extraction. In an interview with *Inside News*, General Htee Moo, Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Headquarter column commander said, “If the DKBA becomes the border guard force they will no longer be allowed to act alone, but follow SPDC orders. Their soldiers already



Under threat from army loggers

follow most SPDC orders. They have been logging in our area since 1996. Every year we pay 500 bath for each household in taxes to them [DKBA] to farm our land. We also log but it is difficult to find people to buy our timber.” Some DKBA soldiers used to belong to the KNLA. According to General Htee Moo they come back with the DKBA and attack villagers. The General is calling on these soldiers to stay away from Karen villagers who want to live in peace, “stay in your towns, you

must not come back to our area and attack us. We will protect our area and will defend the villagers when the DKBA attacks. We are strong, but we need more unity to reach to our aim. We Karen should know that we are Karen and we should love Karen. With unity no army will ever divide us.” While Htee Moo’s sentiments reflect what many Karen, villagers feel the reality is that they still to struggle to survive and live in fear of attacks by DKBA soldiers.

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“While it is up to the Royal Thai Government to develop long-term policies for Burmese refugees, RI would like to see policies developed that promote greater freedom of movement, opportunities for employment outside of the refugee camps, and greater opportunities for advanced education,” says Garcia.

While many Karen desire to return to their homes, according to refugees who have tried, soldiers on both sides of the conflict have booby-trapped and land-mined the jungle, walkways; waterholes and farms surrounding their villages. Further militarization of Eastern Burma has seen an increase in forced army recruitment, forced labor and extortion by Burma’s ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), and their proxy, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA). Many Karen aid organizations maintain a neutral stance on whether Karen should become refugees or risk staying in their own land.

“For IDP’s, when there is no fighting or [Burmese army] operation, they enjoy more freedom; foraging, hunting, farming and breeding animals,” says Saw Steve, secretary for the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP).

“However for a refugee, there is no land to farm, hunt or forage and they have limited freedom. However, in term of security, being in Thailand there is less chance of being attacked by SPDC or DKBA troops compared to inside Karen State.” Saw Steve does not wish to become a refugee. “I don’t need to become a refugee. And I don’t want to become refugee because I want to continue working inside for the Karen struggle.”

Newly arrived refugees building their temporary shelters on Thai border



Hoping for a better future

Over the last 20 years Thailand has given refuge to as many as 150,000 Burmese people escaping the conflict in Burma.

This year alone has seen an influx of new arrivals, and Refugees International (RI) says that the Royal Thai Government should be commended for its humane actions. "Thailand has been incredibly generous in not only receiving the most recent flows of refugees from Karen state, but is also in the process of acknowledging them as official refugees," says Sean Mariano Garcia, Advocate for RI. "We expect that the Royal Thai Government will continue to provide refugee status and safe-haven for any additional flows that enter the country through Karen state. However, it is unclear what the status would be of any people fleeing conflict from Shan state, as the Shan have never been recognized as refugees in Thailand."

However, Saw George of the Karen Refugee Committee says "Thailand does not recognize us as 100 percent refugee, but we are labeled as temporary shelter seekers." The main difference is that at anytime if the conditions improve in Burma, temporary shelter seekers will be forced to return. "Our conditions in Thailand are generally better than in Burma, in that we are not in danger. However, we have no access to employment, advanced education and have limited mobility. Rights groups are campaigning for a change so we have more opportunity, and we pray for this," says Saw George. While Thailand recognizes UNHCR, and allows the displaced access to basic needs, Thailand is not a party

to the 1951 United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention). While Burmese refugees enjoy basic UNHCR protection, Thailand lacks an adequate legal framework for determining refugee status.

With the ongoing torture, systematic rape, forced labor, extortion and other human rights abuses in Burma, refugees are finding themselves in a permanent state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after many years in exile.

RI says that many migrants are still unable to get official recognition for their refugee claim. And, while they stay and enjoy better security and in many cases better employment opportunities, many of their rights cannot be protected without official recognition.

Many Western nations have offered solutions for some refugees by resettling them in third countries. More than 50,000 Burmese refugees have started new lives in the U.S. and other countries. However, according to RI, for those who remain and for the newly arrived, Thai policy only offers two solutions – return to a home wracked by conflict, or stay in a refugee camp along the Thai-Burma border. Refugees International believes that the new displacements should encourage Thailand to reexamine its policy towards Burmese refugees.

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