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MON NATIONAL RELIEF COMMITTEE

MONTHLY REPORT

AUGUST

1997

The Five Points of the Aim of Mon National Relief Committee

- 1. Resettlement of the refugees who become homeless due to the oppression of Rangoon military regime.**
- 2. To help the welfare of the refugees who become jobless due to oppression of Rangoon military regime.**
- 3. To take care and look after the health of the refugees.**
- 4. To fight against illiteracy for the children in the refugee camps.**
- 5. To struggle for human rights.**

The Organization of Mon National Relief Committee

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Phra Wongsā Pala | - Chairman |
| 2. Nai Shwe Thein | - Vice Chairman |
| 3. Nai Kasauh Mon | - Acting Secretary |
| 4. Nai Dung Htaw | - Member |
| 5. Nai Chit Nyunt | - Member |
| 6. Phra Tay Jae | - Member |

Monthly Report of Mon National Relief Committee

(August, 1997)

SLORC's Offensive and Systematic Persecution

Since February 1997, SLORC has launched a full-scale offensive against the KNU, an armed opposition representing the Karen people. This military offensive has forced many thousands of local villagers to flee their homes and take refuge in the Thai-Burma border regions. The refugee numbers, those escaped from the terrible war, have constantly increased in the border regions in both Thai and Burmese sides of the border. But those war-victims did not receive a possible international protection and assistance.

In March and April, the SLORC reinforced more troops and logistics to its initial operation to pressure the KNU to enter for ceasefire talks or surrender. The SLORC's large number of troops have tried to occupy all areas where the KNU and its military faction KNLA troops had taken control for several decades. Recently, the offensive against the KNU/KNLA has intensified in various places of Kya Inn Seik Kyi township and Three Pagoda Pass areas such as Taung Zon, Taung Dee, Khun Khan, Khae Wee, Shwe Lay Inn, Ta Wae Pauk and Ma Au areas. Thus, the KNLA has lost many control areas and the Karen local villagers has faced helpless situation.

When the Karen villagers are under control of SLORC, they are severely mis-treated by the Burmese soldiers. They must be accused as rebel-supporters in every area if the fighting happens around their villages. The male and young villagers are always arrested and severely punished to show the bases of the KNLA troops. Some of them are arbitrarily killed by soldiers. In tactic to keep control the whole village, all villagers' food supplies are entirely confiscated by the troops to force the villagers to be "dependents on soldiers' supplies". The soldiers take more from the confiscated foods and distribute a little amount to the villagers. According to new military strategy of SLORC, it always tries to build a new military encampment soon after its occupation of an area to keep permanent offensive position. In building the military encampments, the local villagers are forced by soldiers to contribute manual labour on a daily basis. The villagers' movement and farming activities are also restricted and they must be accused contacting the KNLA troops nearby if they travel outside of villages. At the same time, the villagers are always arrested for porters in the serial SLORC military operations. The villagers from surrounding area are also forced by soldiers to move into village where SLORC's military bases are situated. Even in the current rainy season, the fighting between the SLORC and KNU troops is on-going and the forced conscription of portering labour by SLORC soldiers is still continuing.

Moreover, on July 28, the Burmese troops from Three Pagoda Pass arrested about ten Karen villagers from Taung Zon area and went back to Kya Inn Seik Kyi town along the Za Meet river by boats. Because of terrible flood and tide in the river, two boats with about 10 Burmese soldiers and some porters were ruined by water flow and nine Burmese soldiers with full equipment drowned by water and died on the spot.

After the rest troops reached to Kya Inn Seik Kyi town, they reported to the higher authorities about the incident. As a result, a column of SLORC troops was sent as an operation to get those arms from under water back. In this operation, they also asked for 5 villagers from each village situated along the Za Meet river for use of human shields along their movement and for the arms salvage operation. The villages which could not provide the numbers of villager they asked have to provide payment about 2000 Kyat per head.

When they launched this operation, they were also attacked by the KNLA troops in the area. Then they also accused the villagers nearby as rebel-supporters. Some villagers were terribly beaten by soldiers. Those villagers were arrested to show the KNLA bases and brought them into the arms salvage operation. When they reached to place where the arms were drown, they forced the villagers group by group submerging into water to get arms from the bottom of the river. When the villagers could not get the arms, they were also tortured by soldiers.

Because of troops' forced confiscation of foods, conscription of forced labour and portering, forced relocation and restriction of movement, cash extortion and ramson and other abuses, the villagers lose chance to work in the farms and faced food-shortage problems as a result in every area. Then, those villagers try to get foods and a safe place to stay and decide to flee their homes. They also abandon their farms, livestock, homes and other belongings. When they flee, it is very dangerous for them to walk along the road to Three Pagoda Pass where the SLORC is deploying a lot of forces on it. Most of them twist another ways avoiding not to meet with SLORC bases. Some of them are also arrested by soldiers and severely tortured by them.

When they reached to the border area, no any refugee camp in Thai territory accept them and provide safety. Even though they fled from systematic persecution by SLORC, they have less chance to stay in Thai territory's refugee camps. According to Thai adopted policy, they will allow the non-Burman ethnic refugees when there is fighting inside Burmese territory. They are constantly refused because of no sound of fighting from inside is heard by Thai authorities and ignored the complaint of them about human rights abuses committed by SLORC troops.

They can stay in camps situated inside Burmese territory, but they feel those camps are not safe. The refugee camps inside Burmese territory are always posed in danger situation or vulnerable to attacks or deploy bases by the nearest SLORC troops. Among the escapees fled from Kya Inn Seik Kyi and Three Pagoda Pass areas, almost are Karen villagers. They have no choice to create a new settlement place inside Burma or Thailand and decide to stay in some Mon villages. Comparing with Karen village, the Mon villages are more stable and provide the new arrivals a possible choice to take refuge. Many escapees also enter into Thailand to seek jobs for income, and refuse to take refuge in Mon villages. Because they felt the Mon villagers or refugee camps inside Burmese territory are unsafe for them to stay.

Although they flee their native homes because of systematic persecution and fear of suppression committed by military regime SLORC, they get less of protection and assistance from the international community when they reach to the border regions. The population movement from inside Burma to Thailand will continue to happen if the fighting is not ceased. The regime has tried to force the KNU to abandon their armed resistance movement and surrender by means of military operation. But it make a little effect to the KNU/KNLA but force thousands of local inhabitant to abandon their harmony life.

Displaced Persons and Immigrants in the Border Region

When the Thai authorities prohibited the new refugee influx not to enter into Thai territory or take refuge in Thai border camp, a new situation is created for them. When they have no other choice to get food, they try to get jobs and enter into Thailand as illegal immigrants. The numbers of immigrant have constantly increased in Thai territory and at the same time, the Thai authorities also launch operations arresting those immigrants.

Thai government always claims that those Burmese immigrants enter into Thailand because of economic hardships in Burma. When we analyze the real reason of the fleeing, those immigrants have entered into Thailand not because of the economic hardship but also because of vari-

ous kinds of human rights abuses committed by SLORC troops.

A total of more than about 30,000 civilians from towns and villages were arrested by SLORC to use them as front-line porters during its major offensive against the KNU. The soldiers also arrested more numbers of porters than they needed and asked ransoms from families of the porters. Portering fees and other extortion related to conscription of portering labour made both urban residents and rural villagers to face economically hardship. Because of this forced conscription of portering, many families of villagers fled their homes across into Thailand via the border refugee camps or villages. They did not choose to take refuge in those refugee camps because they felt that there was not safe for them to take refuge.

Another human rights abuse that forces the villagers to flee their home is constant conscription of forced labour in the military managed railway and motorway constructions in several parts of the country. In the southern part of Burma, the military is constructing many railway and motorway such as 110 miles long Ye-Tavoy new railway construction, 270 miles long Ye-Tavoy-Mergui existing motorway has been under repair, 250 miles long Mergui-Kawthaung new motorway, and etc.,. The Mon, Karen and Tavoyan local inhabitants have been constantly forced to contribute their manual labour without payment. The military also ask payment to hire substituted labourers to the villages which could not provide the number of villagers they demand. This kind of extortion forced the villagers to flee homes and enter into Thailand to seek income to support their families or to pay SLORC.

The accusation of rebel sympathizers against the non-Burman villagers by SLORC troops also make massive population influx to the border regions and then into Thailand. This accusation always happens in black area (free fire zones) where the rebel groups are taking bases for several years. When the SLORC reached into the area, they have absolute power to kill or arrest anyone who is suspected as rebel soldier or rebel-supporter and to bunt down any village which is accused as rebel base. The fear among the local population is always escalated whenever the SLORC launch offensive against the rebels. This fear also create large number of massive influx into Thailand.

All above different situations in different time are evidence that make the population displacement inside Burma especially non-Burman ethnic areas and the unceasing immigrant influx into Thailand. Most of them flee from their country of origin because of fear of systematic persecution and then crossed international boundaries, but they are not recognized as refugees according to UN recognized international principles.

After reaching to the border regions, they have different situation to struggle for their survival. While some single and young persons can easily enter deep inside Thailand to work in construction sites, fishing industries and other hard jobs, the persons who come with their whole families may face difficulty to enter deep inside Thailand. And they decide to work in border areas of inside Thai territories illegally and not enter into refugee camps in Thai or Burmese territories where are posed not so safe for them. Among the total displaced persons, only little percent of them enter into refugee camps.

The deportation of immigrants who are arrested from the whole Thailand have been conducted twice per week via Kanchanaburi Province's immigrant prison to Halockhani Mon refugee camp. At least 2,000 Burmese immigrants are deported to Kanchanaburi Province's border area alone. The arresting of immigrants in many Thai cities has remained normal although the government is issuing work permit to many thousands of Burmese workers, because of immigrant population is always increasing.

The immigrants who remain in the border are almost reliable on works provided by Thai

plantations, furniture factories, border trading and forestry department's reforestation program. These kinds of work are normally hard and feasible for Burmese immigrant day-labourers. But their life is not so safe enough. The local Thai police departments regularly launch operation arresting those immigrants and deport them back into nearest Burmese territory. As an example, the local police departments of Sangkhlaburi and Thong Phar Phoom districts launched an operation to arrest the immigrants who were working for Thais during March and April of this year. Because of this operation, many immigrants fled into Burmese territory where they could not get jobs and income, and many arrested immigrants were detained and then deported to Halockkhani camp.

Many deported immigrants always try to flee into Thailand again because of bad human rights situation and ever-escalating living price in Burma. Their life in Thailand even not safe because of the arrest of Thai authorities, it is better than the life in Burma. The constant refusal of Thai government to provide proper sheltering and allow international protection for Burmese ethnic refugees has escalated the numbers of immigrants in its country. Even Burma became a full member of ASEAN, the situation in Burma is remaining unchanged.

**THE REFUGEE POPULATION OF THE FOUR CAMP ARE FOLLOW
(August, 1997)**

| No | Camp | Family | Adult | | Children | | Total |
|----|------------|--------|-------|------|----------|------|-------|
| | | | M | F | M | F | |
| 1 | Bee Ree | 415 | 486 | 543 | 688 | 772 | 2489 |
| 2 | Tavoy | 685 | 878 | 1087 | 989 | 1144 | 4098 |
| 3 | Halockhani | 1011 | 1324 | 1376 | 1686 | 1733 | 6119 |
| | Total | 2111 | 2688 | 3006 | 3363 | 3649 | 12706 |

Note: The population of Prachuab refugees is unclear but the MNRC continued its supply distribution program to refugees who fled into Thai territory.

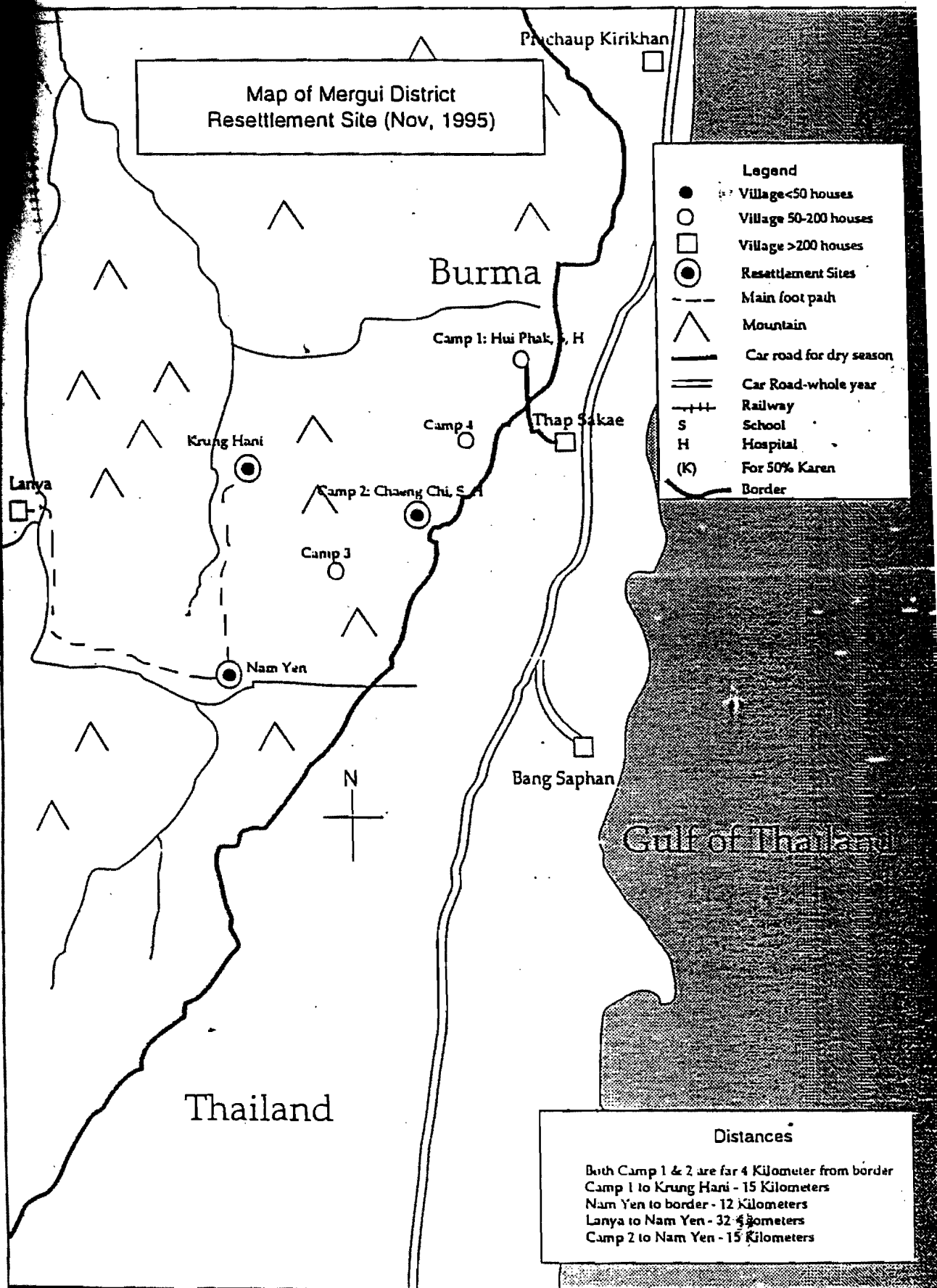
**THE MATERIALS RECEIVED BY THE MON NATIONAL RELIEF COMMITTEE
(August, 1997)**

| No | Organization | Rice (Sack) | Fish Paste (Kg) | Salt (Kg) | Bean (Kg) | Remark |
|----|--------------|----------------|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------|
| 1 | COERR | 250 | 1688 | 1125 | 1588 | |
| 2 | Consortium | | | | | |
| | Total | 250 | 1688 | 1125 | 1588 | |

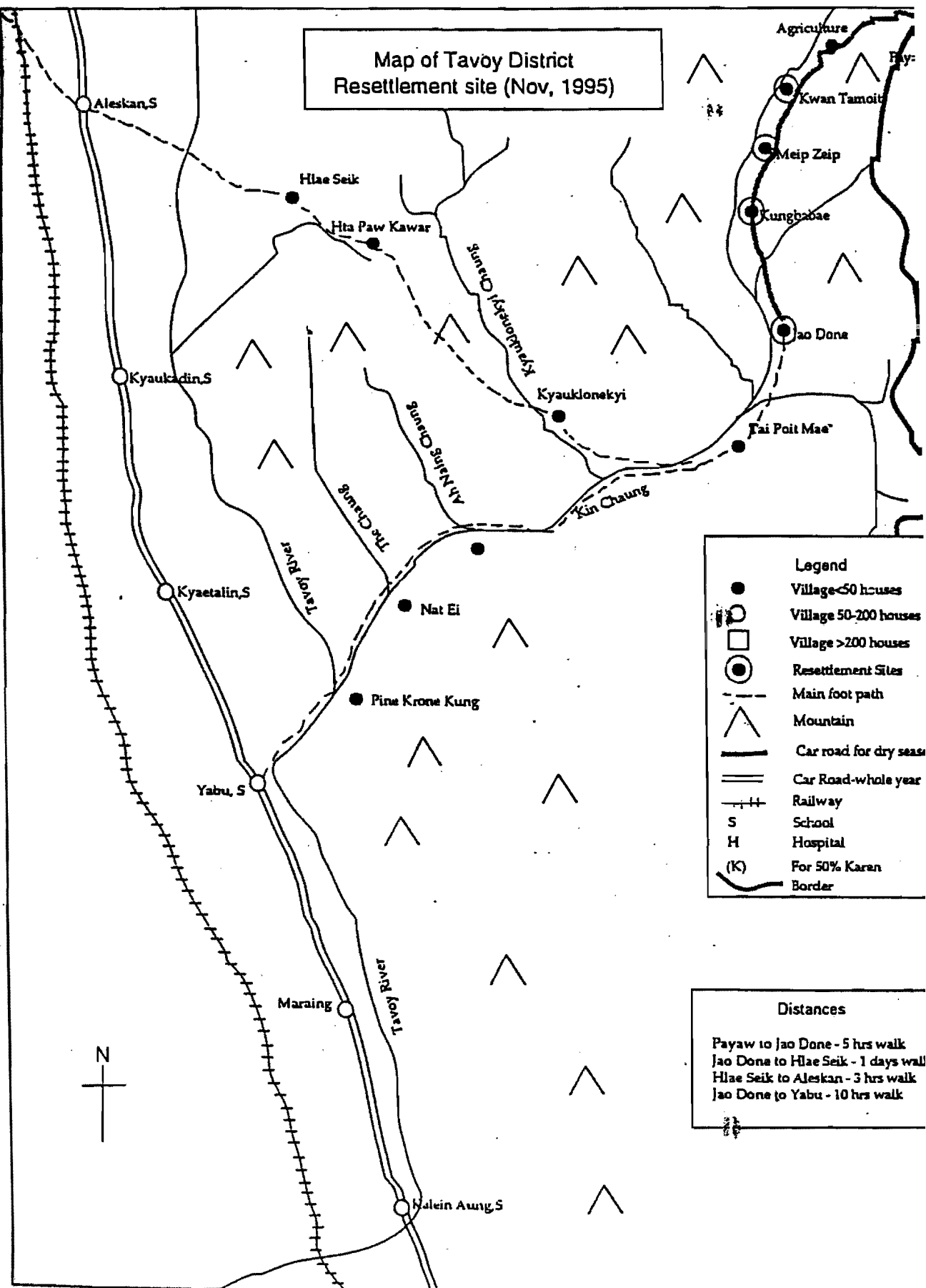
Map of Mergui District Resettlement Site (Nov, 1995)

Legend

- Village <50 houses
- Village 50-200 houses
- Village >200 houses
- ⊙ Resettlement Sites
- - - Main foot path
- △ Mountain
- Car road for dry season
- == Car Road-whole year
- +++ Railway
- S School
- H Hospital
- (K) For 50% Karen
- Border



Map of Tavoy District Resettlement site (Nov, 1995)



Map of Ye River Resettlement site (Nov, 1995)

