

10. The Freedom of Belief and Religion

10.1 Introduction

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

- Article 18, Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

"The military junta that governs Burma monitors the activities of all religious organizations through a pervasive internal security apparatus. The government imposes restrictions on certain religious practices, controls and censors all religious publications, has supported, allowed, or instigated violence against religious minorities, and in some areas of the country, has forcefully promoted Buddhism over other religions. Ethnic minority Christians and Muslims have encountered the most difficulties in recent years."

- U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.¹

The SPDC has estimated that nearly 90 percent of the population of Burma practice Buddhism, with various Christian denominations making up six percent of the population, and four percent practicing Islam. However, the U.S. Department of State believes these figures to underestimate the non-Buddhist population within the country, which they claim could make up as much as 30 percent of the entire population. Similarly, Muslim leaders have previously estimated that approximately 20 percent of the population is in fact Muslim. Other religions represented in Burma include Hinduism, a small Jewish population in Rangoon, with traditional religions, particularly Animism, also practiced.²

Within Burma, clear correlations can be discerned between ethnicity and religion, with Theravada Buddhism the dominant religion among the majority Burman ethnic group as well as the Shan, Arakanese, and Mon ethnic minorities. Christianity is the dominant religion among the Kachin and the Chin and Naga ethnic groups. Christianity is also practiced among the Karen and Karenni ethnic groups, although the majority of Karen and Karenni remain Buddhist. Islam is also widely practiced in some areas, particularly Arakan State, where it is the primary religion of the Rohingya minority.

Ostensibly, Burma has no official state religion. However, since the military seized power in 1962, non-Buddhist minority religions have been marginalised, and since 1999, the U.S. Department of State has designated Burma as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom, and asserts that the SPDC *"imposes restrictions on certain religious activities and frequently abuses the right to freedom of religion."*³

Throughout 2006, the SPDC continued to monitor the meetings of all religious organisations and religious activities and organisations were subject to broad government restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly. Whilst 'genuine' religious organisations are nominally exempted from the requirement to register with the SPDC, in practice only registered organisations can buy or sell property or open bank accounts. Authorities

frequently refused requests for religious meetings or celebrations, and religious publications, and sermons, were subject to censorship throughout the year.⁴

In an assimilative approach to nation building, successive civilian and military governments have tended to view religious freedom in the context of whether it threatens national unity or central authority. As such Buddhism has been promoted as a central weapon in the acculturation of ethnic minority groups, in moves which have collectively been termed 'Burmanization'. Through such 'Burmanization', the regime has made strides towards creating a Burma of 'One race, One Language, One Religion.' In this respect, the Ministry of Religious Affairs includes the powerful Department for the Promotion and Propagation of Sasana (Buddhist teaching), Buddhist teachings form part of the curriculum for all primary schools within Burma, and whilst reports of forced conversions are less frequent than in the past, the junta has, in 2006, utilised bribery, education and marriage in an effort to entice non-Buddhists to convert to Buddhism. Furthermore, advancement in the military and public sector remained heavily dependant on being a Buddhist.⁵

In 2006, as in previous years, religious affiliation was required to be indicated on government-issued identification cards that citizens and permanent residents of the country are required to carry at all times, often leading to harassment or discriminatory practice, particularly against Muslims.⁶

Christians and Muslims continued to face difficulties in gaining permission to construct or repair religious buildings, and there were reports of Christian symbols being destroyed. In most regions of the country Christian and Islamic groups are permitted to build small inconspicuous places of worship with informal approval from local authorities. However, when local authorities or conditions change, informal approvals are often rescinded. In some cases, authorities have demolished existing buildings. The Religious Affairs Ministry justifies restrictions on the construction of religious buildings by claiming that permission "*depends upon the population of the location.*" Conversely, the SPDC zealously sponsored the construction of Buddhist pagodas, often on the past site of destroyed Christian and Muslim buildings and symbols, in areas where the Buddhist population was minimal. Local Christians and Muslims were required to contribute labour and money towards the construction of these pagodas.⁷

The SPDC not only aggressively promotes Buddhism at the expense of minority religions but also seeks to maintain a tight control over Buddhism itself. Whilst there are over 400,000 Buddhist monks, including novices, within Burma, only nine state endorsed monastic orders are permitted to function.⁸ The 1990 Sangha Organisation Law, introduced following the boycotting of alms for soldiers by monks in Mandalay, criminalised all independent monastic orders. The nine remaining legal orders were placed under the central control of the SPDC-sponsored Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee (SMNC).⁹

In 2006, the junta utilised its influence over the monkhood to tightly control the activities of monks within the country. Efforts by monks to promote human rights and political freedoms in Burma have been met with severe repercussions by the regime, with SPDC control extending beyond political action to the charitable and social welfare activities in which monks were engaged.¹⁰ Monks who are deemed to be in violation of the law are subject to the same punishment and abuse as others, and the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners records that as at September 2006, there were 85 monks in prison for political reasons. Those

taken into custody are disrobed and some have been ordered to renounce their vows. Both of these actions are considered highly disrespectful and contrary to Buddhist beliefs.¹¹

According to the basic principles laid down for a future constitution during the on going SPDC controlled National Convention; Citizens will enjoy the right to worship and practice their religions subject to “*law and order, public health and the Constitution*”. The principles recognise the special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the state, and restrictions are placed on any economic, financial, political or other secular activities that may be associated with religious practice. The State also reserves the right to take action against any religion that “*misuses*” their position to “*monopolise*” the political system and “*create hatred between religious organisations and divide them*”, if such behaviour is deemed a “*threat*”.¹²

These provisions, worded as they are, clearly provide scope for the continued restriction of religious freedom, surveillance and oppression of religious minorities, as well as continued state interference in the practice of Buddhism.

The basic principles also indicate that the forthcoming constitution will again fail to recognise the citizenship of the Rohingya minority. The Muslim Rohingya, lacking citizenship and effectively stateless, are cited to face the most discrimination of any minority within Burma, heavily prejudiced against not only for their religion but their ethnicity.¹³ Their non-citizen status prevents them from entering the civil service, and places heavy restrictions on their freedom of movement; unable to travel beyond Northern Arakan and requiring a travel pass to visit a neighbouring village. Rohingya must obtain official permission to marry, which is only granted against high bribes, and after long delays. In addition, their land continues to be confiscated to accommodate Buddhist settlers.



The village of Nya Moo Kee, Nyaunglebin District, was attacked by SPDC troops in March 2006. This photo shows the remnants of the village church on 17 April 2006. The village remained completely abandoned at this time. [Photo: FBR].

10.2 Religious Discrimination against Christians

In 2006, it remained illegal to import translations of the Bible in indigenous languages, and bibles were not permitted to be printed in the Chin language.¹⁴ In addition, the SPDC prohibited certain Christian terms and phrases. As the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes contain terms which are similar to Buddhist Pali terms, the Burma Bible Society has been told to exclude these terms from their Burmese translations of the Bible.¹⁵

The authorities continued to prohibit Christian proselytizing in many areas, and sometimes denied applications for residency permits of known Christian ministers attempting to move into a new area. There were also reports of authorities confiscating the National Identity Cards of citizens who had converted to Christianity.¹⁶ Christians were denied promotion in the military beyond the rank of Major, with all officers above the rank of Major required to be Buddhist.¹⁷ In Kachin State, the highest rank available to Christians was Captain. Furthermore, no Christians were accepted into officer training school.¹⁸

Christians continued to face difficulties in obtaining permission to buy land or build new churches in most regions, with local level SPDC officials, who grant permission for church construction, themselves liable to be penalised by the central authorities.¹⁹ The SPDC has often cited the absence of proper property deeds when refusing permission, and in 2006, the U.S. Department of State reported the arrest of three pastors in Mandalay, charged with land law violations, for the building of new churches. Whilst access to official land titles is made extremely difficult due to the country's complex land laws, and government title to most land, similar Buddhist projects did not face the same difficulties.²⁰

In Rangoon, Mandalay, and elsewhere, authorities allowed the construction, registration or continued operation of community centres and orphanages run by various Christian groups on condition that these groups agreed not to hold Christian services there or erect any Christian signs. Authorities in the Rangoon area closed several house churches during the year because they did not have proper authorisation to hold religious meetings. Others remained operational only after paying bribes to local officials.²¹

Chin Christians

As Christianity is a central element of Chin identity, the Chin Christian population has been particularly harshly targeted under SPDC policies of 'Burmanisation'. In a town in Magwe Division, Buddhist monks, supported by the SPDC, actually prohibited the practice of Christianity in the town. When a Christian SPDC official tried to organise a Christian worship service he was ordered not to proceed. He ignored the order, and local people came to stone his house. One Chin pastor interviewed by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), in 2006, insisted that some Christians had been forced to sign an agreement not to worship in their own homes, and in certain areas of Chin State, Christians have been required to pay bribes of up to 20,000 kyat for the privilege of continuing their church activities. In addition, Christian pastors are often forced to labour for the military, particularly on Sundays, while Buddhist monks are exempted.²²

In 2006, the SPDC continued to construct Buddhist pagodas throughout Chin State, often forcing Chin Christians to contribute money or labour to their construction. These pagodas have often been placed on the site of crosses which are firstly destroyed.²³ In May 2006,

authorities in southern Chin State reportedly decided to build three pagodas in Matupi Township where Buddhists account for an estimated one percent of the total population. One Christian pastor reported that crosses erected by the Christians were dismantled to make way for the pagodas.²⁴ The Chin National Front identifies these pagodas as a symbol of control and occupation.²⁵

Concurrently, some Christians in Chin State claim that authorities have not authorized the construction of any new churches since 1997, and in 2006, authorities jailed three persons for constructing new churches in Chin State. In some parts of the state, however, recently built churches are reportedly evident.²⁶

Despite the fact that there were no reports of forced conversions in 2006, the SPDC continued to institute policies designed to engineer conversions to Buddhism. Chin families were offered monetary and material incentives, such as rice, as well as exemption from forced labour, if they agreed to convert to Buddhism.²⁷

The right to education has also been wielded as an inducement, with the children of poor families offered educational opportunities and subsequently forced to participate in Buddhist worship.²⁸ On 19 September 2006, it was reported that 15 Christian Chin students had left their military run school as they had been forced to recite Buddhist prayers. The SPDC developed the school, under orders from Colonel San Aung, in 2005, with students drawn from the female Chin youth who were not required to pay school fees or board. When the school was opened the local authorities had promised to allow freedom of religion for its pupils. Buddhist prayer later became compulsory. *“Since our family, cannot afford our daughter’s education, I told her to do whatever they want students to do. She thinks that it is a means of converting them from Christianity to Buddhism, so she is not willing to accept it. She said that it also contrary to her faith. I can’t help anymore”*, stated the father of one pupil.²⁹

A further insidious means of conversion, reported by CSW in 2006, was the creation of a special army battalion in Kalaymyo, Sagaing Division, mandated to encourage SPDC soldiers to marry and convert Chin women, especially the daughters of Chin pastors. Whilst some soldiers did marry Chin Christians, it was reported that many of these soldiers actually converted to Christianity. As a result, the battalion was disbanded. Those soldiers who converted to Christianity were denied promotion and transferred, whilst those who successfully converted their wives were promoted.³⁰

Kachin Christians

As with the Chin population the vast majority of ethnic Kachin are Christians, and as in Chin areas, SPDC soldiers are reportedly encouraged to marry Christian women as a means to convert them to Buddhism. If a Buddhist soldier marries a Kachin Christian woman and fails to convert her, he is denied a chance of promotion.³¹ In addition, and again akin to practices in Chin State, Kachin children are offered a free education in SPDC schools and then forced to participate in Buddhist worship. CSW reported that children, between the ages of 13 and 16, who refused to participate in Buddhist worship, in one such school in Bhamo, were severely beaten, and that Kachin girls, attending the school, were forced to dress as Buddhist nuns.³²

The SPDC continued to construct Buddhist shrines in Christian communities, often using the forced labour of the Kachin community to do so.³³ Concurrently, Christian monuments and symbols continued to be destroyed. In October 2005, SPDC Northern Commander, Brigadier General Ohn Myint, was reported to have ordered his men that he did not want to see any Christian symbols on the roadside within the state. Restrictions were also placed on the construction of new churches in Myitkyina and Bhamo, and the SPDC regularly held staff meetings and trainings on Sundays, so as Christian employees unable to attend were fired and replaced with Buddhists.³⁴

Karen Christians

During SPDC military offensives in northern Karen areas, throughout 2006, there have been reliable reports of village churches being burnt to the ground, vandalised and desecrated. Oftentimes, however, when villages are razed, the church is one of the few buildings not burnt to the ground. This is attributed to the fact that many SPDC soldiers believe in superstitions surrounding the destruction of churches. Nevertheless, it is a common tactic for the same troops to place landmines at the entrance of the church.³⁵ On 6 October 2006, the same superstitious leanings led to all Christian services being banned in Maladaw, Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District. The SPDC blamed Christian worship for the fact that lightning had struck two soldiers during morning service.³⁶

In areas of Karen State under the control of the junta aligned Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), Christians continued to be persecuted for their beliefs, with unverified reports that DKBA authorities continued to expel villagers who converted to Christianity.³⁷ In addition, the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) reported DKBA harassment of Christian teachers, who were often accused of having connections with the rival Karen National Union. In June 2006, DKBA K'Saw Wah Special Battalion led by Commander Hla Maung accosted a teacher named Htee Lah in Lah Kyo Koh village. When the second lieutenant discovered that Htee Lah was Christian he threatened to kill him, before the village head intervened pleading that the community had requested the teacher to come to teach in their village. Whilst the second lieutenant relented, he informed the village head that Htee Lah would not be allowed to come back next year.³⁸

Translation of Correspondence between SPDC and Kachin Baptist Church Regarding Construction of New Church

Taken from: *Carrying the Cross: The Military Regime's Campaign of Restriction, Discrimination and Persecution against Christians in Burma*, CSW, 2006.

1. Request for permission for construction of a church building

Date: XXX 2004

To: Chairman Township Peace and Development Council

XXX

Concerning the above-mentioned subject, XXX Baptist Church is one of the Churches of XXX Baptist Association in XXX Township. Therefore, I recommend that the permission be granted for the construction of a truly needed chapel for the church members of XXX Baptist Church.

From: In the name of Christ,

Rev.XXX

General Secretary

XXX Baptist Association

XXX

2. Village Peace & Development Council approval

Date: XXX 2004

I hereby recommend that XXX Baptist Church construct a chapel on the land plot belonging to XXX of block X in XX Village, XX Township.

From: In-charge of a hundred households

Village Peace and Development Council

XXX Village, XXX Township

3. Confirmation of approval from Chairman of the Village Peace & Development Council

Date: XXX 2004.

According to the recommendation of the authority in-charge of a hundred households, I hereby countersign and recommend that there is no objection against constructing a religious building for XX Baptist Church in the and plot donated by XX, a resident of Block XX, XX Village, XX Village tract, XX Township, Kachin State.

From: Chairman Village Peace and Development Council

XXX Tract, XXX Township

4. Order to suspend construction

To: Pastor

Baptist Church

XXX Village

Date: XX2006

Concerning the above-mentioned subject, you are informed that the construction of the Chapel by XXX Baptist Church of XXX Village Tract, XXX Township be suspended until any additional permission from the authorities concerned arrives.

From: In-charge of a hundred households Village Peace and Development Council

XXX Village,

XXX Village Tract, XXX Township

5. Further order to suspend construction

Date: XXX 2006.

To: Pastor

XX Baptist Church

XXX

Concerning the above-mentioned subject, it has been evident that you did not obey the instruction to continue the construction of building only after permission be obtained from the authorities concerned step by step. Therefore, I hereby inform you that the construction of the building be suspended altogether and you follow the proper procedure.

From: Superintendent Officer

Township Municipal Office

Township Municipal Branch Office

XXX Branch, XXX Village

6. Further order to suspend construction

Date: XXX 2006.

To: Pastor

Baptist Church

XXX Village

Concerning the above-mentioned subject, you had been informed that the construction of church buildings be suspended by XXX Baptist Church until any further permission from the authorities concerned was obtained. But, it is evident that the construction of the Church building has been continued, and therefore, now you are informed again to stop the construction at once.

From: In-charge of a hundred household

Village Peace and Development Council

XXX Village Track, XXX Township

7. Order for the demolition of church

Date: XXX 2006.

To: Pastor

XXX Baptist Church

XXX Village Tract

1. The above-mentioned letter in reference had informed me that a new Church building (80' x 300' x 25') is being constructed on the land plot (B- 749577) by XXX Baptist Church, XXX Township under the leadership of Pastor XXX without any permission from the authorities concerned, and that the building posts, walls and roof have been erected. It also ordered that the building under construction be demolished because it was being constructed despite your having been informed to resume the construction only after the permission from the authorities concerned had been obtained.

2. Therefore, you are informed that the building under construction be demolished. You must submit a report of your accomplishment of this to Township Peace and Development Council.

From: For / Chairman

(XXX, Secretary)

Township Peace and Development Council

XXXX

Persecution of Christians - Partial List of Incidents for 2006

During 2006, a Christian-run orphanage near Rangoon was threatened with closure unless it registered with the authorities immediately. However, the terms of registration required the appointment of a management committee with a majority of SPDC appointees. The orphanage was also told to remove all Christian symbols, such as crosses, from the orphanage, and barred from Christian teaching.³⁹

Also during 2006, a church north of Rangoon was burned down by local Buddhists, reportedly with the tacit approval of the authorities. All of the pastor's personal belongings were thrown into a nearby pond. The pastor was forced to leave and threatened with a three year prison sentence if he returned.⁴⁰

In January 2006, SPDC forces destroyed a 50-foot cross on a hillside in Chin State and forced Christians to erect Buddhist shrines in its place.⁴¹

On 15 January 2006, SPDC LIB #30 soldiers stopped a Sunday church service in Satu village, Matupi Township, southern Chin State, and commandeered 20 persons to serve as porters, as well as demanding 3 chickens, and 2 buckets of rice, to be arranged within the hour.⁴²

On 3 February 2006, ward authority Chairman Myint Swe of Rangoon Insein Township issued an edict banning worship at the local Phawkkkan evangelical church. Two days later, around 50 worshippers defied the order and attended a church service. Authorities ordered the worshippers who attended to report their presence to the local authority office.⁴³ During February, evangelical Christians in Rangoon Insein, Phawkkkan, Shwepyitha and Hlaing Thaya areas were forced to pledge not to attend their churches or bible classes, and the churches were threatened with closure. Church leaders reported the actions of their local authorities directly to Sen. Gen Than Shwe, to no avail.⁴⁴

On 25 February 2006, Yeh Zaw, a Christian residing in the compound of Rangoon Insein Kanphawt evangelical church whose members were banned from worshipping by the local authorities, was arrested in Pa-an, Karen State, for traveling without an identity card. He was later charged under Penal Code Sections 406 for criminal breach of trust and 420 as a confidence trickster. Yeh Zaw had previously written a letter to SPDC Chairman Sen. Gen. Than Shwe urging him to end the persecution of his church.⁴⁵

In March 2006, Lt. Col. Hla Maw Oo, director of the Border Trade Department, ordered Kachin Baptists to remove a church from its current location in Mong Yu in northeastern Shan State, by 20 April, to make way for an economic development zone along the Chinese border. The official reportedly offered 8.7 million kyat compensation for the church that Christian businessmen built for 15 million kyat in 2002. The official threatened to involve the military if the members did not comply.⁴⁶

On 9 March 2006, troops from LIB #366, #377 and #399, based at Maladaw village, Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District, burned down a local church, as well as setting fire to the house of a villager and stealing livestock.⁴⁷

In April 2006, leaders of a church in Bhamo, Kachin State received a letter from the municipal authorities ordering them to immediately cease the construction of their new

church. Whilst, verbal permission had been granted for the construction of this church by former Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt, permission was rescinded under orders from the Ministry of Religious Affairs.⁴⁸

Also in April 2006, local authorities in Mandalay refused permission for local churches to hold a joint Easter program. Whilst permission was granted to hold a general meeting, the authorities required the churches to submit detailed plans for the meeting in advance, including such minor details as name of the pianist and the songs they were to play.⁴⁹

During the first week of April 2006, SPDC Colonel Tin Hlah forced the owners of stores in Hakha, Chin State, to pay 200 to 500 kyat each to cover the expenses of the Buddhist water festival. Christian store owners who refused to pay were threatened by the local authorities, and all persons were ordered to participate in the festival.⁵⁰

On 18 April 2006, a group of 38 people returning to Shan State from a Christian congregation held in northern Thailand were reportedly detained by the junta aligned United Wa State Party (USWP) in Mongmai. Charges against them were said to include holding sermons and distributing papers without official permission. Nineteen of them, mostly young people in their teens, were released after a few days. The remaining detainees were subsequently released on 22 May 2006. It is believed the USWP is weary of missionaries after previously accusing them of providing information to U.S. authorities which was used to indict 8 of their leaders.⁵¹

In May 2006, it was reported that the local Christian community were facing demands to finance the construction of a Buddhist pagoda in the Chikhung hills about six miles from Kalaymyo, Sagaing Division. Construction began in 2005 at the order of SPDC divisional officer, Lieutenant Colonel Aung Moo Myint. Whilst church leaders in Kalaymyo resisted such demands claiming “*Matters pertaining to religion should not be through collection but donation*”, it was reported that collections continued apace in the surrounding villages.⁵²

In May 2006, authorities in southern Chin State reportedly decided to build three pagodas in Matupi Township where Buddhists account for an estimated one percent of the total population. One Christian pastor reported that crosses erected by the Christians were dismantled to make way for the pagodas.⁵³

In June 2006, troops from SPDC LIB #567 and IB #240 in Gkeh Der village, in the Mya Swa Chaung area of Toungoo District, broke the church door, desecrated and destroyed the communion cups, broke two guitars and threw away church materials. Further, In Ler Klah Der village, Toungoo District, LIB #567 broke into the church, and destroyed Bibles, hymnals, two guitars and subsequently threw away all the church’s belongings.⁵⁴

In July 2006, it was reported that the junta had confiscated land for the construction of a Buddhist monastery in an area of Chin state bordering Sagaing Division. About 13 acres of land (40 blocks) was confiscated in Tedim Township, Chin state. The military government issued an order for confiscation of the land and construction of the monastery-cum-orphanage in January 2006. No compensation was paid to the owners of the land. The monastery-cum-orphanage was being built under the patronage of Colonel Aung Myo Myint. Orphans and workers were required to convert to Buddhism prior to admission.⁵⁵

Also in July 2006, a planned Christian conference in Kalaymyo, Sagaing Division, was

prevented from taking place after the number of attendees grew to roughly 3,000, as opposed to the projected 300. *“The authorities moved in, dispersing all except ten of the leaders who were imprisoned as proverbial ‘scapegoats’”,* an interviewee reported to CSW. Those imprisoned were released ten days later.⁵⁶

Between June and August 2006, SPDC Captain Kyaw Win forbade a Christian church in Kachin State from building a function hall, to be used for wedding receptions, Christmas celebrations and other events, until they had a government permit for the construction. Meanwhile, he ordered the villagers to establish physic nut plantations on all the available church land, and warned that if they refused, the SPDC would occupy all the land including the church compound.⁵⁷

In August 2006, it was reported that authorities had barred a Kachin Baptist church in Rangoon from holding a planned literary workshop as it had not obtained official permission. The church had held similar workshops annually for the past four years without having to obtain official permission. In 2006, the church was informed that it must *“report or seek permission first from the authority.”*⁵⁸

On 4 August 2006, SPDC LIB #4 destroyed a church in the Maung Thay Der area of Toungoo District.⁵⁹

On 17 August 2006, it was reported that the SPDC was planning to construct a mosque in Tedim Town, Chin State. One proposed site for the planned mosque belonged to the Reverend Cope Memorial Baptist Church. It is an unusual move by the SPDC, particularly given that there are no Muslims in the town. One Chin democracy activist suggested that the plan is a political tactic of the junta to counter Christianity, given that Buddhism has failed to take root in northern Chin State.⁶⁰

On 19 September 2006, it was reported that 15 Christian Chin students had left their military run school as they had been forced to recite Buddhist prayers. When the school was opened the local authorities had promised to allow freedom of religion for its pupils. Buddhist prayer later became compulsory. The SPDC developed the school, under orders from Colonel San Aung in 2005, with pupils drawn from the Chin female youth who were not required to pay school fees or board. *“Since our family, cannot afford our daughter’s education, I told her to do whatever they want students to do. She thinks that it is a means of converting them from Christianity to Buddhism, so she is not willing to accept it. She said that it also contrary to her faith. I can’t help anymore”,* stated the father of one pupil.⁶¹

In October 2006, SPDC Colonel Tin Hlah ordered the closure of a Christian-run orphanage, in Hakha, Chin State, leaving 30 children without a home. The building was destroyed. Tin Hla also ordered the closure of another Christian run school in Hakha, which had been responsible for 100 students.⁶²

On 6 October 2006, it was reported that all Christian services had been banned in Maladaw, Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District. The SPDC blamed Christian worship for the fact that lightning had struck two soldiers during morning worship.⁶³

On 6 November 2006, it was reported that Christian government employees in Matupi, Chin State, had been forced to contribute 2,000 kyat each towards the ‘Tazaungdaing’ Buddhist festival.⁶⁴

10.3 Religious Discrimination against Muslims

The Muslim population of Burma can be divided into four distinct groups, all of who follow the Sunni sect of Islam. Ethnic Burman Muslims are thought to have been converted between the 9th and 14th centuries by Islamic merchants and scholars. The Chinese Hui generally live in Mandalay and the north, and Muslims of Indian and Pakistani descent are found throughout Burma, particularly in the larger cities. The final group, and most oppressed of the Muslims living in Burma, are the Rohingya who speak a Bengali dialect and live mostly in Northern Arakan State, and are not recognised as legal citizens.⁶⁵ (For more information on the Rohingya see sub section below).

Whilst ethnic Burman Muslims, unlike the Rohingya, were generally recognized as legal citizens of the country, they continued to face severe forms of discrimination throughout 2006, and were often forced to pay large bribes in order to receive National Registration Cards. Ethnic Indians and Bengali Muslims were reportedly required to pay even larger bribes in order to receive their National Registration Cards.⁶⁶ It has been reported that having “Muslim” on the card has often led to harassment at the hands of the police or immigration authorities. A person’s religious denomination is also generally required to be declared on official application forms, such as passports, and being a Muslim can result in discriminatory practices.

Muslims also had difficulty obtaining birth certificates, and a local official in Sittwe, Arakan State, reportedly issued a verbal order in 2005 prohibiting the issuance of birth certificates to Muslim babies born in the area. Whereas in Rangoon, Muslims were generally able to obtain birth certificates for newborns, local authorities refused to allow the babies name to be included on the families’ household registers.⁶⁷

Muslims were discouraged from enlisting in the military, and those who did were often required to list “Buddhism” as their religion on their application form. Aspirations for promotion, within the military, generally required conversion to Buddhism of not only the officer, but often also their wife.⁶⁸

The SPDC did not allow Muslim government employees, including village headmen, to grow beards, and dismissed some who already had beards during 2006. In addition, authorities have insisted that Muslim men applying for Temporary Resident Cards (TRCs- granted in lieu of citizenship) submit photos without beards, in order for their application to be processed.⁶⁹

Throughout the country, Muslims were required to obtain advance permission from the Township authorities whenever they wished to leave their hometowns, and all Muslims in Arakan State, not only the Rohingya, were generally denied such permission, although permission could sometimes be obtained through a bribe. Whilst Muslims in other parts of the country could generally obtain permission to visit areas of Arakan State, they often found it much harder to obtain permission to return.⁷⁰

Some Townships in Arakan State have actually been declared “Muslim free zones” since 1983 including Thandwe, Gwa and Taung-gut. In the latter two, Muslims are completely barred from residing in the area. In Thandwe, those already settled at the time of the order were permitted to continue to do so. However, no other Muslim is able to buy property or move to the Township.⁷¹

Muslim populations also remained vulnerable to forced relocation throughout 2006, in particular the Rohingya in Northern Arakan. (see sub section on Discrimination against Rohingya below). Elsewhere, KHRG claimed in 2006 that: *“The relocation and removal of Muslim communities in Karen State, either through explicit displacement programs or persistent repression leading to ‘voluntary’ departure to refugee camps or other areas of Burma, has been a consistent policy of the SPDC and DKBA.”*⁷² In Pa’an District, Karen State, Muslim populations were evicted from their villages into forced relocation sites in order to make way for an expanded SPDC army camp in November 2006. SPDC LIB #547, LIB #548 and LIB #549 evicted 200 Burmese Muslims households living in Dt’Nay Hsah (Nabu) village and forced them into a relocation site established next to Kler Dt’Gkoo village. It is unclear whether any farm land will be made available to the relocated community. In the event that there is, the Muslim rice farmers will still be required to construct new paddy fields, a generation spanning process.⁷³

Muslims relocated during mass relocations from inner city Rangoon in the early 1990’s continue to be discriminated against in the development of their new towns. These communities were relocated in order that the SPDC sell their land to private investors. In their new towns no provision has been made for any religion bar Buddhism. The almost exclusively Muslim neighbourhood of Tamwe Township was relocated en masse to a site outside of Pegu, where the population continues to be denied permission to construct a Mosque.⁷⁴

In fact, Muslims throughout the country continued to be denied the right to construct new Mosques, or even the freedom to repair existing ones. Furthermore, mosques in Rohingya areas of Arakan State were subject to mass closures throughout 2006, with many being destroyed. (For more information see sub section Discrimination against the Rohingya).

On 16 February 2006, an anti Muslim riot broke out in Singbyukyun Township, Magwe Division. It is thought the riot started in response to rumours that Muslim men had raped a Burman woman near Sinbyukyun Town. Ethnic Burmans attacked and burned Muslim and ethnic Indian homes, shops, and mosques. Rioting and looting spread to surrounding towns in Chauk and Salin Townships. Local security forces did not intervene at first but later imposed a strict curfew in several towns to prevent the violence from spreading further. Reliable sources said authorities arrested 17 persons in Sinbyukyun and another 55 persons in Chauk, although most of these were reported to be Muslims. Unofficial sources claimed that three persons died and another 10 were injured in the riots. Three mosques in Yenangyaung, Chauk, and Sagu were destroyed in the violence. Authorities sealed off the mosques, did not permit the Muslims to rebuild them, and failed to conduct any official inquiries into the attacks.⁷⁵ Reliable reports, have attributed previous, seemingly spontaneous, inter faith civic disturbances as being instigated by disguised SPDC agents instructed to stir up trouble.⁷⁶

Discrimination against the Rohingya

The Muslim Rohingya minority are predominately found within Northern Arakan State where they actually make up the majority of the population within Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung Townships. The Rohingya, ethnically and religiously related to the Chittagonian people from the plains of southern Bangladesh, are cited to face the most discrimination of any minority within Burma, heavily prejudiced against not only for their religion but their ethnicity.⁷⁷

Whilst reputable historians suggest the Rohingya are descended from Islamic merchants of the eighth and ninth centuries who made their living as tradesman in coastal ports, the SPDC has dismissed this claim, claiming they are illegal immigrants who have infiltrated the country from the borders of Bangladesh and India since British colonial rule in 1824. The 1982 Citizenship Law rules that no individual or group can claim citizenship who did not reside in Burma prior to British rule.⁷⁸ As such the Rohingya living in Burma are effectively stateless. Whilst treated as foreigners, the Rohingya are not even issued with Foreigner Registration Cards. Furthermore, the UNHCR estimates that only around 50 percent of the Rohingya population has been issued with Temporary Registration Cards.

In January 2006, the state run newspaper, the *New Light of Myanmar*, reported on the definition of a citizen, as to be enshrined in the forthcoming state constitution, being developed under the SPDC controlled National Convention process:

“All persons who have either one of following requirement are citizens of the Union of Myanmar;

(a) All persons born of parents both of whom are nationals of the Union of Myanmar,

(b) Persons who are vested with citizenship according to existing laws on the date this Constitution comes into force.”⁷⁹

As such, the Rohingya will continue to be denied citizenship when the constitution is eventually completed and brought into force.

Following the ouster of Khin Nyunt in 2004 and the related purges of SPDC departments under his control, there was a brief period during which the Rohingya were not so heavily persecuted. However, human rights abuses again increased throughout 2005 and 2006. NaSaKa (Burma's Border Security Force), previously under Khin Nyunt's supervision, was brought under military control, and the former Military Intelligence re-emerged in the area, variously referred to as SaYaPha, SaRaPa or Military Security Force. The Arakan Project have reported that, since March 2006, SaRaPa have been recruiting local informers among Rohingya youth, who are intimidating the public with threats of denunciation, largely as a means to extort money.⁸⁰

The non-citizen status of the Rohingya prevents them from entering the civil service, and places heavy restrictions on their freedom of movement, with Rohingya not allowed to travel beyond Northern Arakan and requiring a travel pass just to visit a neighbouring village. In October 2005, Prime Minister Soe Win instructed top level military officials to strictly prevent the movement of Muslims.⁸¹ Subsequently, movement restrictions were heavily enforced throughout 2006 especially in South Maungdaw.⁸² Since July 2006, travel passes have only been valid for three days, whereas previously they were generally valid for anywhere between seven days and a month. Obtaining a pass to travel between Maungdaw and Buthidaung was also reported to have become harder to obtain in the second half of 2006.⁸³

Access to public services for the Rohingya is extremely limited. The SPDC reserves secondary education for citizens only. As a result, Rohingya do not have access to state-run schools beyond primary education. Furthermore, students who complete high school are

generally denied permission to travel to Sittwe or outside of Arakan State to attend university. Whilst permission is sometimes granted after the payment of a significant bribe, there were reports of bribes being accepted before permission was nevertheless denied.⁸⁴ Access to healthcare is also severely curtailed by the movement restrictions placed upon the Rohingya.⁸⁵ (For more information see Chapter 12 Freedom of Movement, Assembly and Association).

Throughout 2006, the authorities frequently conducted population checks and other types of census on Rohingya communities. Family lists were required to be updated for each new-born baby or deceased person. The Rohingya faced arrest, fines and possibly torture if a member of a family was found to be absent, if found to be housing an unregistered guest, or if they had failed to update their family lists to declare deaths or new born babies.⁸⁶ Population checks in December 2006 were reported to be particularly stringent with those absent without permission simply erased from their family list and their relatives fined 5,000 kyat.⁸⁷

The requirement to obtain permission to marry is exclusively imposed on Muslims in Northern Arakan, nowhere else in Burma, not even in Sittwe. Extortionate fees are asked and permission can take over a year to be granted. The authorities actually stopped issuing marriage permission to Rohingya couples altogether for up to five months in 2005. Whilst permission to marry has again been granted since October 2005, permission is only granted with the usual requisite bribe. Furthermore, two additional criteria have been instated. Couples must sign a declaration stating that they will not have any more than two children, and the bridegroom is not permitted to have a beard. The policy regarding the number of children is explicitly aimed at reducing the high population growth rate among Rohingya.⁸⁸ In 2006, authorities also required applicants to submit a TRC when applying for permission to marry. As stated, roughly 50 percent of Rohingya do not possess these cards, and since this requirement has been introduced, the cost of a TRC has reportedly increased to 20,000 kyat.⁸⁹ There were numerous reports of couples being arrested throughout 2006, after marrying in the absence of official permission. There were also numerous cases of couples leaving for Bangladesh in order to avoid this requirement, leading to family members being arrested in absentia of the couple.

Movement restrictions, population censuses, and restrictions on the right to marry, form part of a whole body of restrictions and checks which allow local authorities to continuously extort money from the Rohingya population. Families have to pay 2,000-2,500 kyat to include a new-born baby in their family list, 500 kyat to take out the name of a deceased person and between 1,500 and 3,000 kyat for a photograph.⁹⁰ When a young child died in South Buthidaung in April 2006, his father couldn't afford to remove his name from the family list. He was assaulted and detained for two days, only being released after his wife paid a fine of 20,000 kyat.⁹¹ Even if Rohingya abide by such diktats, they are vulnerable to arbitrary arrest whereby their release is secured only after the payment of a large bribe.⁹²

It has long been the practice of the SPDC to establish 'model villages' within Rohingya dominated areas. The inhabitants of these villages are made up of ethnic Burmans who are either forcibly relocated, especially in the case of those with a criminal record, or given large incentives to move. The apparent purpose of these 'model villages' is to 'dilute' the Rohingya population; a colonisation of their lands. Not only are Rohingya often evicted from their land in order that it be used for these new villages, but they are also forcibly employed in the construction of the villages.⁹³ During 2006, four new model villages were reported to

have been constructed by NaTaLa (Ministry of Border Affairs) in Northern Arakan including one in Nyaung Chaung, South Maungdaw, in early 2006, and two in north Maungdaw which required the eviction of Rohingya villagers. At the end of the year, a 'model village' was being built with forced labour in Taung Pyo Let Wah leading to the forcible eviction of 150 households without any compensation. The families were not assigned any other site to relocate to. Some went to take shelter in relatives' houses but a number of them fled to Bangladesh.⁹⁴ In addition, Rohingya land was confiscated to establish physic nut nurseries, for the placement of a new NaSaKa camp in South Buthidaung, and a new market in North Buthidaung.⁹⁵

On 30 May 2006, the new commander of Western Command and chairman of Arakan SPDC ordered the compilation of a list of mosques and madrasahs (Koranic Schools) within Sittwe, Buthidaung and Maungdaw Townships. Subsequently, from July through to September 2006, a significant number of mosques and madrasahs were closed by order of the authorities throughout Northern Arakan. On 26 August 2006, it was reported that in Rathedaung Township, alone, NaSaKa forces had razed 13 mosques, 4 madrasahs, 18 moqtobs (basic Arabic schools) and three Hafez Khanas (Qur'an memorising centres).⁹⁶ Justifying such closures, NaSaKa often accused the mosque committees of building, extending or repairing the mosque without adequate permission, or running a madrasah in the mosque compound when the premises were only allowed to function as a mosque. Further, Mosque committees were questioned about the origin of their funds. By the end of 2006, some mosques and madrasahs, in particular in Rathedaung Township, were allowed to reopen after the payment of large bribes ranging between 150,000 and 1,000,000 kyat.⁹⁷

Abuses against the Rohingya have in the past led to two mass exoduses, each of more than 250,000 refugees to Bangladesh, first in 1978 and again in 1991 and 1992. Most were repatriated, sometimes forcibly, under an agreement between Bangladesh and the SPDC, and in 1991 with the involvement of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. There are approximately 21,000 Rohingya Muslims remaining in refugee camps in Bangladesh refusing to return because they fear human rights abuses, including religious persecution. Another 10,000 live in Malaysia.⁹⁸ In 2006, the Rohingya continued to leave Burma. From November, an unusually high number attempted to make the journey across the sea from Bangladesh to Malaysia, via Thailand. From the time the monsoon season ended up until the end of 2006, somewhere in the region of 1,000 people from 15 separate boats had been arrested in southern Thailand, as a result of this influx. Large numbers continued to arrive in the first months of 2007.⁹⁹ (For more information see Section on Rohingya Boat People in Chapter 15 Situation of Migrants).

Persecution of Muslims - Partial List of Incidents for 2006

At the beginning of 2006, a hamlet in Loun Don village tract, North Maungdaw, was forcibly moved for the construction of a new 'model village' for Buddhists. The Muslim hamlet was relocated closer to the hills. Eighty new settlers' families arrived in October 2006.¹⁰⁰

In January 2006, authorities refused permission for Eid al-Adha sacrifices to be performed in areas of Rangoon bar a few remote sites, meaning Muslims were forced to travel long distances in order to participate. Ceremonies were also reportedly restricted to three hours in length. Some Buddhists take offence at the sacrifice of cows during the festival.¹⁰¹

In January 2006, the Rohingya population of over ten villages claimed that the SPDC military had forced them to carry building supplies for three 'model villages' at Padauk Myin, Mala Myin and Thaza Myin, Rathidaung Township.¹⁰²

In January 2006, numerous Rohingya civilians in Sittwe, particularly from Kyauktaw, Pauktaw, Mrauk Oo, Minbya, Mraybon, Kyakpru and other towns, were arrested for travelling without a "Form 4"; a form originally introduced for use by foreigners.¹⁰³

On 1 January 2006, Mohammad Kobir, a Rohingya villager from Kyingthama Palley Daung village, Buthidaung Township, Arakan State, had to pay a 300,000 kyat bribe to NaSaKa officers in order to escape punishment for the marriage of his daughter. Whilst they had previously applied to NaSaKa for a marriage permit, a lengthy delay meant that the couple had been married in the absence of the required permit. When an officer of NaSaKa Area No. 9, Tang Bad Zaire, enquired about the matter, the newly-weds fled the village and Mohammed Kobir was forced to pay the fine in order to settle the matter.¹⁰⁴

On 10 January 2006, it was reported that SPDC soldiers along with Buddhist settlers, moved to the region by the SPDC, were stealing cattle from Rohingya farmers in Northern Arakan State. If the owners of the cattle wanted to claim their livestock back from the troops, they were forced to pay a bribe of between 20,000 to 50,000 kyat according to the size of the cow or bull. Any unclaimed animals were eaten.¹⁰⁵

On 16 January 2006, Rohingya students in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State were informed they would not be issued travel passes despite paying bribes to local officials. The passes were necessary for the students to attend university in Sittwe. Immigration officers had demanded 270 students each pay a 2,000 kyat bribe. The students also had to give one carpet for every four students, costing between 55,000 and 60,000 kyat. The immigration officers also asked the students to give two guarantors per student who would be responsible, if they did not come back after completing their courses. Subsequently, the immigration officer of Maungdaw informed the students that they would not be given the passes to go to Sittwe for higher education, as they were not citizens of Burma.¹⁰⁶

On 19 January 2006, a Buddhist shrine was vandalised in Nga Khu Ya near Maungdaw. As a result, NaSaKa arrested local Rohingya villagers en masse. Detainees were assaulted with some severely tortured whilst in the NaSaKa camp. Hot water was poured down the nostrils of some of the villagers.¹⁰⁷

On 24 January 2006, it was reported that around 80 Rohingya villagers from Ngakura village, Maungdaw Township in Arakan State were arrested and accused of breaking the tip of a pagoda. The arrests were seen as arbitrary, with rich villagers being arrested in the hope of extorting money, local residents said. One village elder added that as the location of the village is strategically important the authorities have been trying to relocate the villagers for a long time.¹⁰⁸

On 9 February 2006, Mohammed Ibrahim, 35 and Noor Boshor, 30, two sentries (forced), from Wabag village of Kyi Kan Pyin village-tract (Khawarbill), were arrested by a NaSaKa patrol after allegedly sleeping whilst on duty. That night they were taken to NaSaKa headquarters, locked up and severely beaten and then forced to buy their freedom by paying 6,000 kyat. A village elder alleged that the NaSaKa takes it for granted that that if they don't beat up the accused, they won't get money from them.¹⁰⁹

On 10 February 2006, U Aye Maung and other police officers from Buthidaung Town reportedly arrested seven Rohingya villagers from Dongpyin village for having relatives living in foreign countries. Those arrested were:

1. Moulvi Baser, aged 50;
2. Moulvi Noor Alam, 35;
3. Baser Ahamed, 48;
4. Ulla Meah, 65;
5. Aul Kalam;
6. Moulvi Nozir, 65; and
7. Azi Rahman, 60.

Villagers had to pay between 30,000 and 40,000 kyat for the release of each person.¹¹⁰

On 16 February 2006, an anti Muslim riot broke out in Singbyukyun Township, Magwe Division. It is thought the riot started in response to rumours that Muslim men had raped a Burman woman near Sinbyukyun Town. Ethnic Burmans attacked and burned Muslim and ethnic Indian homes, shops, and mosques. Rioting and looting spread to surrounding towns in Chauk and Salin Townships. Local security forces did not intervene at first but later imposed a strict curfew in several towns to prevent the violence from spreading further. Reliable sources said authorities arrested 17 persons in Sinbyukyun and another 55 persons in Chauk, mostly Muslims. Unofficial sources claimed that three persons died and another 10 were injured in the riots. Three mosques in Yenangyaung, Chauk, and Sagu were destroyed in the violence. Authorities sealed off the mosques and did not permit Muslims to rebuild, and failed to conduct any official inquiries into the attacks.¹¹¹

On 24 February 2006, about 100 Rohingya were arrested by police and traffic police who seized their trishaws and trailers which they had purchased from NaTaLa villagers in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State. The trishaws and trailers had been provided to the Buddhist villagers after they had been moved to the area by the junta. The villagers could not adjust to their new lifestyle and sold their trishaws and trailers to the Rohingyas. Many subsequently fled the NaTaLa villages.¹¹²

In April 2006, the young son of a villager from South Buthidaung passed away. However, the villager was unable to afford the fee charged to remove a person from the SPDC's family lists. As a result he was detained for two days during which time he was beaten up. His wife was forced to pay a fine of 20,000 kyat in order to secure his release.¹¹³

On 3 April 2006, SPDC army outpost 18 on the Maungdaw-Buthidaung Road seized money from Rohingya travelling along the road despite the fact that some were in possession of valid permits. After taking the money from them and destroying their travel permits, the labourers were detained, tried and sentenced to two years imprisonment.

The Rohingya sentenced to two years imprisonment, their age, and amount extorted from them, were:

1. Mohamed Salim, age 18, 50,000 kyat;
2. Shamsul Alam, age 19, 60,000 kyat; and
3. Zani Alam, age 19, 40,000 kyat.¹¹⁴

On 10 April 2006, it was reported that U Shweyaw Khasin, a religious leader in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, was granted permission to construct a new mosque in his village after paying a bribe of 200,000 Bangladeshi Taka to Major San win Khain, head of NaSaKa Area No. 4, and gifting a gold bar to Lt. Col. Thein Htay. However, the construction of the

mosque remained a controversial issue among the local authorities. After completion of the mosque, the Maungdaw District administration office inspected the building and papers and found that the permission paper signed by U Ran Myo Aung, Chairman of Maungdaw District, had been forged. Police arrested U Khasin in connection with the fraudulent permission paper. He was detained in Likera police outpost, but was later released from custody on the orders of Lt. Col. Thein Htay.¹¹⁵ U Khasin reportedly went in to hiding upon his release, fearing further reprisals. On 29 May 2006, a police team from Maungdaw led by Sub-Inspector Hla Sein came to Likera Village and arrested his brother, Hasin in relation to the construction of the mosque and bribes paid.¹¹⁶

On 18 May 2006, an SPDC column under the command of Captain Win Tin Aung from the military operation planning bureau in Buthidaung arrested over 30 Muslims on the mountain pass near Mi Gaung Tet Village, located between Buthidaung and Kyauktaw for travelling without permits. It was reported that the SPDC severely punishes travellers who use the mountain pass as it is seen as an affront to their orders, being rare in that it is not covered by SPDC check points akin to other roads in the area. Included in those arrested were Muslims from the following villages:

1. Ngaki Thauk Village, 6 persons;
2. Min Gri Taung, 5 persons;
3. Kintha Mar Village Tract, 4 persons;
4. Dapai Sara Village, 3 persons;
5. Thay Kan Kutson, 2 persons; and
6. Tha Pike Taung, 2 persons.¹¹⁷

In May 2006, the SPDC repeatedly postponed permission for the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Islamic Religious Affairs Council (IRAC) and its sixteenth Islam Religious Assembly in Myitkyina, Kachin State. Local authorities eventually agreed to allow the convocation from 30 May to 31 May. However, on 29 May, the authorities asked IRAC leaders to postpone the meeting again. Subsequently, the Kachin PDC chairman agreed to allow the nearly 400 delegates to meet for just one and a half hours on 31 May. The Muslim delegates found this unacceptable and returned home without convening.¹¹⁸

On 30 May 2006, the new commander of Western Command and chairman of Arakan SPDC ordered the compilation of a list of mosques and madrasahs within Sittwe, Buthidaung and Maungdaw Townships.¹¹⁹

In June 2006, 30 houses in Ba Da Nar village tract, North Buthidaung, received an eviction order after a monk had a vision that a Buddha statue had been buried in that area and that a pagoda should be built there. Whilst the villagers initially refused to obey the order, they were summoned to the NaSaKa camp, at the end of October, and forced to sign a declaration that they had agreed to move voluntarily. A pagoda was built on their land along with a police station. The villagers were not provided with a relocation site, and up until the end of 2006, were temporarily staying on someone else's land.¹²⁰

On 24 June 2006, NaSaKa forces raided a number of Muslim villages in Buthidaung Township where they checked on family lists, unlicensed construction of mosques, and marriage licenses. They were reported to uncover 3 mosques and one religious school which were illegally constructed by local Muslim people in the area. The authorities also located 2 illegally married couples and 18 families who had moved from one village to another without

permission. The NaSaKa were said to be arranging to sue those individuals involved in the construction of mosques and religious schools.¹²¹

On 26 June 2006, NaSaKa officers raided Ngakhura village, under Nasaka Area No. 5, to inspect family lists, birth rate, and marriage licenses. The authorities discovered 18 children who were born in contravention of the rule governing the number of children each Muslim couple were allowed. They also found that 8 people had recently fled to Bangladesh and 34 people, 13 males and 21 females, had migrated within Burma without permission.¹²²

On 30 June 2006, Nami Ullah, 25 years old, and Hasina Begum, 20 years old, from Kon Tan village-tract, Rathedaung Township, were arrested by NaSaKa when preparing to cross to Bangladesh to get married. They had not been able to obtain permission from the authorities in Burma. They were each sentenced to 3 years jail on 6 July 2006 and are held at Maungdaw jail.¹²³

At the end of June 2006, 50 people were arrested in Alel Than Kyaw for being married without official permission. Most were later released after paying a fine.¹²⁴

On 2 July 2006, NaSaKa troops arrested 17 Rohingya villagers in Fokira Bazaar, Maungdaw Township, as they had come to the village without obtaining travel documents. The villagers were subsequently forced to work on a road construction site between Aung Zu and Khamaung Zeik in Maungdaw Township as punishment.¹²⁵

On 19 July 2006, the *tatmadaw*, NaSaKa, and police forces raided the homes of every house in the Shwezar Quarter of Maungdaw Town (consisting of 5 smaller villages, Shwezar Mrauk, Shwezar Guna, Dayla Wra, Kanyin Chaung, and Aung Bala), blocking the roads and moving from house to house throughout the night. At least 70 people, mostly Muslim, were arrested, either on suspicion or for not having proper permission from their village councils to be staying in a different household or town.¹²⁶

In August 2006, in South Maungdaw (Inn Din and Kyauk Phun Du), more than 100 Rohingya were forced to leave their villages for Bangladesh, by order of NaSaKa. These people had had their names deleted from their family list in previous years and had been living in Bangladesh ever since, only returning following the ouster of Khin Nyunt. They had paid bribes to their village council in order to be reinstated to the family list, but were nevertheless forced out of their villages by NaSaKa.¹²⁷

In the first week of August 2006, 22 Rohingya from Lake Ya village-tract (Kumir Khali) of Maungdaw Township were reportedly detained by NaSaKa for repairing and rebuilding the Kumir Khali mosque roof in June 2006. NaSaKa requires that permission be obtained for repairs to be undertaken but rarely provides that permission. The men were arrested, tortured and detained in Maungdaw jail. Those detained included:

1. Molvi Mohammed Hossain, 40 years;
2. Ali Zuhar, 15 years;
3. Mahommed Shafi, 40 years;
4. Abdul Hasim, 35 years; and
5. Chairman Din Mohammed (a.k.a. Maung Mon Kha).¹²⁸

On 6 August 2006, police raided a wedding ceremony in Soparang Village, Buthidaung Township despite authorities granting permission for the event. Police arrested about 50

people and assaulted many of the guests while the ceremony was taking place, apparently because music was being played through a loudspeaker. They also threw away food that had been prepared for the guests. One villager asserted, “*It is nothing but harassing the Rohingya people to extract money.*” Those arrested, including the bridegroom, were later released after paying 30,000 kyat to the police.¹²⁹

On 17 August 2006, 15 Rohingya in Myoma Kanyin Tan (Siddar Para) Maungdaw Township, were arrested and interrogated by police on charges of stealing electric wires. After a week of interrogation, all were freed without charge on payment of 120,000 kyat each, a relative reported. Those arrested included:

1. Shafi Ullau,
2. Abdul Fayas,
3. Mohammed Hanif,
4. Ziabul Hoque,
5. Azu Meah, and
6. Sayed Kasim.¹³⁰

On 26 August 2006, it was reported that NaSaKa forces were destroying Rohingya religious buildings in Rathedaung Township, Arakan State. They had reportedly razed 13 mosques, 4 madrasahs, 18 moqtabas (basic Arabic schools) and three hafez khanas (Qur’an memorising centres) according to a local religious leader. They allege the buildings were illegal as they were constructed without the necessary documents.

Those buildings reported to be destroyed in Rathedaung Townships were:

1. Thabray Taw village; 2 Mosques, 1 madrasah, 5 moqtabas, 1 hafez khana;
2. Phet Leik village; 5 mosques, 1 madrasah;
3. Thinga Net village; 1 mosque, 1 madrasah, 1 moqtab, 1 hafez khana;
4. Pyein Taw (Pryin Daung); 1 mosque, 1 madrasah, 1 moqtab, 1 hafez khana;
5. Shweip Pyin village; 1 mosque, 2 moqtabas;
6. Atet Nan Yar village; 1 mosque, 2 moqtabas;
7. Auk Nan Yar village; 1 mosque, 5 moqtabas; and
8. Sin Oo Pyin village; 1 mosque, 2 moqtabas.¹³¹

On 4 September 2006, Mohamed Hussain, 37 years, from Pauktaw Township, was arrested for staying temporarily in Bogar Dill village, Sittwe, without an ‘out pass’ from Pauktaw. He was detained by immigration officers at Sittwe, Myuma police station camp #1. On 8 September 2006, he was sentenced by Sittwe Court to two and a half years imprisonment with hard labour under Acts-2081/06, 188. According to villagers in Sittwe, out passes cost between 1,000 and 1,500 kyat.¹³²

On 11 September 2006, 24 year old Shamshu Alam, a Rohingya of Thapay Taw (Bassara) village, Myint Hlut (Merulla) village tract, Maungdaw Township was forced to pay 80,000 kyat to NaSaKa in order to be granted permission to be married. He was forced to pay a further 10,000 kyat to NaSaKa to conduct the ceremony.¹³³

On 15 September 2006, 27 year old, Shuna Meah, of Myint Hlut village, Maungdaw Township was forced to pay NaSaKa 150,000 kyat for permission to marry and a further 15,000 kyat for permission to hold the wedding ceremony.¹³⁴

On 23 September 2006, the commander of the NaSaKa Area No. 9, Major San Wine Khine, visited upper Kyaungdaung village, in northern Buthidaung Township, to press ahead with

plans to relocate a mosque and a Madrasah. The commander of NaSaKa camp No. 23, located in the area, had previously informed the higher authorities that, *"The existing mosque and madrasah of the Rohingya people near our camp is an eyesore. It is also a source of danger for us, if terrorists attack our camp from the madrasah, the camps will be an easy target. So, it is suitable if we build an outpost in place of the mosque for our camp's security."* However, villagers had refused to comply with an order to relocate the mosque and madrasah, unless they were guaranteed a suitable new site and permits for the new location. Major San Wine Khine and his accompanying personnel had been enlisted to oversee the relocation of the buildings irrespective of the villagers' views.¹³⁵

On 9 October 2006, Maulana Mohammed Shafique, 27 years old, principal of a madrasah and a religious leader, from the KhanYaung Chaung (Khayoung Khali) village of Maungdaw Township, was arrested by NaSaKa, on the allegation that he had been communicating with villagers working in foreign countries and receiving financial support from them for the school. He was detained at NaSaKa Camp No. 6 for three days, and suffered mental and physical torture before being sent to the Maungdaw police station on 12 October 2006. He was later sentenced to two years imprisonment by the Maungdaw Court, a relative reported.¹³⁶

On 4 November 2006, it was reported that Morium Khatoon, 35 years old, from Tan May Village, Buthidaung Township, had been arrested in lieu of her daughter, who had escaped to Bangladesh with her husband, after being married without the permission of NaSaKa. A relative reported that Morium Khatoon was sentenced to two years imprisonment by the court in Buthidaung on 1 October 2006.¹³⁷

On 9 November 2006, two columns of NaSaKa troops conducted raids on three Muslim villages in Maungdaw Township. Troops led by Major Than Thay blocked all roads surrounding Aukpru Ma village and checked every household for irregularities in the family lists, unregistered births and non permitted guests. They reportedly arrested some of the villagers. A second raid took place in both Kran Soe Ree and Wra Thik, Aungtha Bray village tract, where at least 8 villagers were arrested. One villager asserted that those arrested in the raids are typically freed after paying bribes to the NaSaKa officials.¹³⁸

On 8 December 2006, Mohamed Hussain, 25 years old, and his wife, both of Dunsay village, Rathedaung Township, were arrested by NaSaKa because they married without permission. They had been married 12 months previously, secretly, because permission had not been granted. They have a 1 month old baby. Their families attempted to seek their release, but were told the money they had gathered, 40,000 kyat, was not sufficient.¹³⁹

On 15 December 2006, it was reported that Muslim students at government schools in Than Twe Township, Arakan State, had been forced to pay bribes to immigration officials in order to be issued mandatory identification cards, which were being distributed to Buddhist students free of charge. One parent stated *"They said, our children's applications were to be submitted to Nay Pyi Daw as they are mixed-bloods, and that it would cost us about 50,000 kyat. Some people paid the money between four and five months ago but their applications have not progressed yet."* Immigration officials denied procuring bribes for the issuance of identification cards, stating *"We didn't ask for a penny. And it's not that we don't issue IDs for them. With their cases, we have to submit very detailed files [to Nay Pyi Daw]. So it's not easy to access their detailed background information via schools,"* the official said.¹⁴⁰

10.4 SPDC Promotion of and Control over Buddhism

The military junta in Burma has for a long time promoted Buddhism as a central weapon in the assimilation of ethnic minority groups, in moves which have collectively been termed ‘Burmanisation’, whereby, the regime has attempted to create a Burma of ‘One Race, One Language, One Religion.’ Concurrently, the regime has manipulated the pervasive and popular nature of Buddhism to further their political agenda and garner legitimacy in the eyes of the population. In 2006, state run media not only frequently promoted Buddhist teaching and scripture, but often reported on SPDC officials paying homage to Buddhist monks, making donations at pagodas, and organising ostensibly voluntary donations and labour for the construction and maintenance of Buddhist sites.¹⁴¹

However, in promoting and legitimising itself through the promotion of an already widely respected institution, the SPDC is acutely aware that it is paradoxically offering its support to a religion which represents one of the largest potential threats to its own illegitimate grasp on power. As a result, the SPDC not only aggressively promotes Buddhism at the expense of minority religions but also seeks to maintain a tight control over Buddhism within the country. Whilst there are over 400,000 Buddhist monks, including novices, within Burma,¹⁴² only nine state endorsed monastic orders are permitted to function. Following the boycotting of alms for soldiers, by monks in Mandalay; the 1990 Sangha Organisation Law, criminalised all independent monastic orders, with the nine remaining legal orders falling under the central control of the SPDC sponsored Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee (SMNC).¹⁴³

The Department for the Perpetuation and Propagation of the Sasana is responsible for the SPDC’s management of Buddhist monks and Buddhist schools. The SPDC funds two Buddhist Sangha Universities, in Rangoon and Mandalay, which train monks under the control of the SMNC.¹⁴⁴ Further, the SPDC funds the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU) opened in Rangoon in 1998, with an aim “*to share the country’s knowledge of Buddhism with the people of the world*”; the main language of instruction being English. Whilst the ITBMU, is in principle open to the public, it is reported to only accept candidates approved by SPDC authorities or recommended by a senior pro-government abbot.¹⁴⁵

In 2006, the junta utilised its influence over the monkhood to tightly control the activities of monks within the country, and all political action for monks was strictly curtailed. Monks were debarred from preaching political sermons or criticising SPDC policies.¹⁴⁶ In addition, monks are not permitted to join political parties, and, since 1995, the SPDC has prohibited any opposition political party member from being ordained as a monk or religious leader.¹⁴⁷ Whilst this measure has not been consistently enforced, some monks remained in prison throughout 2006 as a result of violating this order. For example, the abbot of Shwepyithar religious college, Reverend U Zawana is currently serving a life sentence in Toungoo Prison, Pegu Division; arrested for accepting former members of All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF) into the monkhood.¹⁴⁸

Concurrently, the SPDC frequently restricted political parties such as the NLD and pro democracy groups such as the 88 Generation Students from performing religious ceremonies with perceived political connotations, or on important historical dates. Whilst pro democracy forces were often harassed themselves, the junta also threatened monks themselves to not allow such ceremonies to take place at pagodas or monasteries, and even prevented monks from receiving donations from the NLD. (For specific examples see list of incidents below.)

In August 2006, SPDC authorities reportedly arrested 5 Buddhist monks alongside 15 laymen at a monastery in Arakan State. They were charged with permitting members of the NLD to meet on monastery premises. At the close of 2006, all 20 remained in prison.¹⁴⁹

SPDC control over the monkhood extended to the charitable and social welfare activities in which monks were engaged.¹⁵⁰ In August 2006, it was reported that local authorities had been pressuring and intimidating a monk in Magwe Division as a result of him providing help to HIV/AIDS victims. Reverend Einthariya, a monk from Mahasi Yeiktha Monastery was repeatedly told on 21, 22, and 23 August that his charitable actions were not in accordance with the codes of conduct of a monk. He was also summoned by members of the Township Sangha Maha Nayaka and told not to resume his charitable work due to an order from the chief administrator of religious affairs and the local authority chairman. He was threatened with arrest if he failed to comply. Reverend Einthariya had been supporting HIV/AIDS victims for three years and helped patients contact NLD volunteers in Rangoon. He also procured medicines for local patients and distributed educational material. He vowed to continue his work in the face of SPDC oppression.¹⁵¹



State controlled Television and Press run stories almost daily reporting on SPDC officials paying homage to Buddhist monks and making donations at pagodas. In a country where the vast majority of citizens are Buddhist, religion is heavily exploited by the SPDC's propaganda machinery to legitimise the regime. [Photos: New Light of Myanmar]

On 28 August, Reverend Einthariya was expelled from his monastery. He recalled:

*"The abbot summoned me and said; there are many pressures. The monastery also has a meditation centre and (its reputation) could be damaged. By being considerate to the benefits of the majority, find a new monastery. I was summoned and told thus at 2.15 pm. I answered, I will move out at the end of the Lent, Thadingyut, my lord, because it is now the Lent. (By religious law, Buddhist monks are supposed to stay inside their monastery during Lent). There is a meditation course going on during this Lent. I think it is due to the HIV case. Therefore, be considerate to the benefits of the majority, he said and went back to his room. It is good that I be absent (from the monastery) for the benefit of the majority I said and kowtowed the abbot, and I said, please allow me (to leave) and I left the monastery."*¹⁵²

Local authority and USDA members were reported to have put intense pressure on the abbot telling him that the reputation of the monastery's meditation centre was under threat, and insinuated the official title of the abbot (Aggamaha Dammasariya) might be withdrawn or monetary support cut off, if the reverend wasn't removed.

*"As they repeatedly told the abbot that action might be taken against him, he became quite distressed. Originally, the abbot told me that there was no problem as I was doing health matters. The abbot is a holy man. When it was insinuated that his meditation centre might be closed down, he became very distressed. That's why the abbot came to tell me."*¹⁵³

On 13 September 2006, it was reported that Reverend Einthariya continued to be monitored and harassed by agents of the State:

"Currently, I am staying at Sanaynan Monastery as it is allocated by the abbot. Everything is fine, but before I moved to Sanaynan Monastery, I went to go and see a monastery to live permanently. While I was doing that, they raided the monasteries in Yenangyaung they thought that I was staying at night. District police and the Sa-Pha-Ya (Military Security Force) members searched the monasteries with motorbikes late at night causing alarms in town."

Reverend Einthariya confronted the authorities about their activities, who denied any plans to arrest him, but admitted that they did want to know where he was living. Reverend Einthariya vowed to continue his charitable activities.¹⁵⁴

Whilst Reverend Einthariya had not been arrested by the end of 2006, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) estimated that there were 85 monks in prison for various charges, at the close of the year, including many serving life sentences such as the Venerable U Thondara of Myingyan, who was arrested during the 1988 pro democracy demonstrations.¹⁵⁵ In 2006, SPDC military commanders retained jurisdiction to try Buddhist monks in a military tribunal for *"activities inconsistent with and detrimental to Buddhism."* Travel restrictions, including an overnight curfew, also remained in effect at many monasteries throughout the year.¹⁵⁶

Control and Oppression of Buddhists - Partial List of Incidents for 2006

On 20 February 2006, it was reported that monks detained Insein prison were being used as porters by the SPDC in Karenni state. Reverend Dhamma Dhaza (aka Soe Win), who had escaped to the Thai border informed the *Kantawaddy Times* that he had been posted with LIB #250, whilst two other monks were said to be still serving LIB #427. Reverend Dhamma Dhaza had been arrested on 9 December 2005 whilst attempting to mediate in a dispute between the police and 5 youths at the Hlaing Thaya religious festival in Rangoon.¹⁵⁷

On 6 April 2006, Nyar Na Temple authorities, the base for the Pegu Division Sangha Maha Nayaka instructed local temples and monasteries not to allow their monks to go out after 8 pm in the evening. The order followed clashes between monks and policemen near Shwe Maw Daw pagoda. A member of Sangha Maha Nayaka said the restrictions were the result of pressure from the SPDC authorities.¹⁵⁸

On 14 April 2006, troops from SPDC LIB #223 operating in Shwegyin Township, Nyaunglebin District, destroyed a Buddhist monastery in Htee Nya Lay Kee village, and confiscated a generator, 9 baskets of rice, 20 viss of oil, 5 viss of salt, 60 steel plates and 3 big pots from the monks.¹⁵⁹

On 13 May 2006, local police, SPDC officials, and members of the USDA and Auxiliary Fire Brigade, evicted two abbots and 54 young monks when they closed down a monastery in Taungup Township, Arakan State. Whilst the reasons behind the evictions were unclear, it was reported that the SPDC had accused the monastery of creating instability in the region and posing a threat to local peace and order.¹⁶⁰

On 28 June 2006, a car travelling towards Murng-Ton Township was stopped by SPDC patrol LIB #332 to check the passengers ID cards. A 19 year old novice monk, from Wan Naa village in Kaaad Phui Village tract in Murng-Kerng Township did not have any ID, but was found to be in possession of 1,000,000 kyat. Upon finding the money, the soldiers accused him of carrying a gun, and being a deserting Shan soldier. His fellow passengers, who reported the event, do not believe this to be the case, asserting that they knew him to be a genuine monk. He was detained and as of December 2006, he had not been seen since.¹⁶¹

On 2 July 2006, 2 monks, Wila Tha, and Than Keisa, were arrested in U Shwe Maw Village, Thadwe.¹⁶²

On 13 July 2006, villagers from Lower Thehkone, Hmawbi Towhship, Rangoon Division, alleged that the abbot of their village monastery, Reverend U Uttama, sold two ancient Buddha statues, which they believed to have extraordinary powers, to Kyaing Kyaing, the wife of Sen. Gen. Than Shwe, for a price of 276 million kyat. The abbot denied having anything to do with the disappearance of the statues.¹⁶³

In August 2006, SPDC authorities reportedly arrested 5 Buddhist monks alongside 15 laymen at a monastery in Arakan State. They were charged with permitting members of the NLD to meet on monastery premises. At the close of 2006, all 20 remained in prison.¹⁶⁴

On 1 August 2006, it was reported that Lt-Col Maung Maung Shein, the Eastern Rangoon District authority chairman, donated goods to the head monk of Maggin Monastery in Rangoon's Thinganggyun Township, known to be frequented by political activists. He requested that they not accept donations from political circles in the future. It is not known how the monks reacted to the authorities' request.¹⁶⁵

On 13 August 2006, 11 volunteers were arrested the night before a Buddhist merit-making ceremony in honour of those who were suffering or who had died from HIV/AIDS. The volunteers were due to participate in the ceremony along with 52 HIV/AIDS patients. The event was designed to make those suffering from the disease feel supported, and to raise donations to pay for medical treatment. The event was organised by the patients themselves, who sent a letter of explanation to local SPDC authorities and met with Lt-Col Maung Maung Shein, chairman of the Rangoon's Eastern District Peace and Development Council, to give notice of their intentions. They received little in return for their efforts to go through official channels, however. The association of elder monks threatened to disrobe any member of the monastery involved in the proposed ceremony, while Maung Maung Shein threatened to close down the Tha Zin Clinic-established by a Dutch-based NGO that supported those patients planning to attend the event. Furthermore, local officials and members of the USDA

visited the Meggin monastery to insist that the monks hold a parallel event, scheduled for the same time as that proposed for the merit-making service. Authorities, also, reportedly pressured the monastery to select a new senior abbot more supportive of the regime. This posturing by the junta ended at midnight on the day prior to the scheduled ceremony, when officials raided the monastery and arrested the volunteers for not obtaining permission to stay over night. The volunteers were released after less than a day in custody although the event had to be cancelled.¹⁶⁶

On 8 August 2006, the abbot of the new Maha Leti Monastery at Chauk, Magwe Division presided over a religious service in memory of all those who lost their lives in the democracy uprising of 1988. On the day, authorities threatened those collecting alms for the monks with arrest. The abbot was later interrogated by SPDC authorities for his role in the service. The abbot claimed that pressure from local authorities was not unusual and that they had pressured the monks not to host an NLD event for the birthday of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, earlier in the year.¹⁶⁷

On 2 September 2006, it was reported that a major from Artillery Battalion #135 in Thanbyuzayat Township, southern Burma, prevented the traditional funeral of an abbot from being held in the temple grounds, as the land belonged to the military following their prior confiscation of it. Villagers were forced to take the body of the abbot to the village cemetery despite heavy rain. The temple land had been resold for army business, despite the fact that Burmese law does not bestow the right on the military to seize religious land for resale.¹⁶⁸

On 7 September 2006, local authorities in Myingyan, Mandalay Division, limited the length of traditional annual religious vigils, from more than 20 days to just seven days. It was reported that the USDA issued the order to the Sangha Maha Nayaka through the local district authority. Buddhist abbots who are known to speak about political matters during their sermons were also banned from taking part in the vigils, whilst others signed a pledge not to talk about political terms during their sermons.¹⁶⁹

On 14 September 2006, it was reported that the abbot of Shwepyithar religious college, Reverend U Zawana, serving life in Toungoo Prison, Pegu Division, was not being allowed out of the prison to receive treatment for piles. Reverend Zawana was arrested for accepting former members of All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF) into the monkhood.¹⁷⁰

On 26 October 2006, it was reported that authorities in the Sittwe, Arakan State, had deployed additional police forces at several key sites, most notably at several monasteries and temples. The move followed reports that a group of Arakanese monks who had been living in Rangoon had come to Sittwe to form a Young Monk Union. The Young Monk Union had been famous for its activities during the 1988 democracy uprising, and was formed to carry out the people's desires in accordance with the Buddha's way. Monks in Rangoon had reportedly secretly reformed the Union a few months previously, making demands for the release of five 88 Generation Student leaders.¹⁷¹

On 9 August 2006, 88 Generation Students organised nationwide religious ceremonies in memory of those who lost their lives during the struggle for democracy and human rights. In response, the SPDC directed security to be tightened within the areas of Sittwe, Mruaku, Thauangkok, and Kyuakphyu Township. As such, the organisers were reluctant to invite too many people due to a fear of the authorities intervening. Rather than intervening, plain clothes security personnel took the names of those involved.¹⁷² On the same day, the

authorities at Rangoon's Shwedagon Pagoda barred around 30 political activists from conducting their regular weekly prayer vigil for political prisoners, for the first time since the event had been initiated in 2004. The local TPDC secretary, Tun Hla Sein, personally refused entry declaring it was because they were wearing the pinkish clay colour 'pinni' jackets of the NLD. Those barred had earlier in the day attended the more inflammatory event organized by the 88 Generation Student group.¹⁷³

On 30 October 2006, a week of candle lit prayer ceremonies, organised throughout the country, calling for the release of political prisoners, and a peaceful resolution to the country's political crisis, began. Security was tight. Nay Tin Myint, an active 88 Generation student leader based in Rangoon stated that "*security personnel are everywhere and they tried to block every entrance to the Pagoda*". It was also reported that the ceremony in Mandalay on the second day was unable to go ahead as the roads to the Pagoda were blocked by the authorities.¹⁷⁴ Throughout the week there were further reports of the authorities harassing those taking part. The authorities in Aungmye (Allen), Magway Division visited the local monasteries where the events were being held and threatened their monks. In nearby Chauk, SPDC agents photographed participants. In Sittwe, Arakan State, the police cordoned off religious compounds.¹⁷⁵

On 7 November 2006, 14 pro-democracy activists, including members of the NLD, were detained briefly at Shwedagon Pagoda, reported one of the detainees, Naw Ohn Hla. They were taken into the trustee's office and warned that they could not gather in groups of more than 5 people to pray at the Pagoda. They were released in the evening.¹⁷⁶

In late November 2006, the SPDC reportedly passed an order decreeing that no more than three people from any organisation or party could gather near Shwedagon or Kyaikhtiyo Pagodas.¹⁷⁷

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