

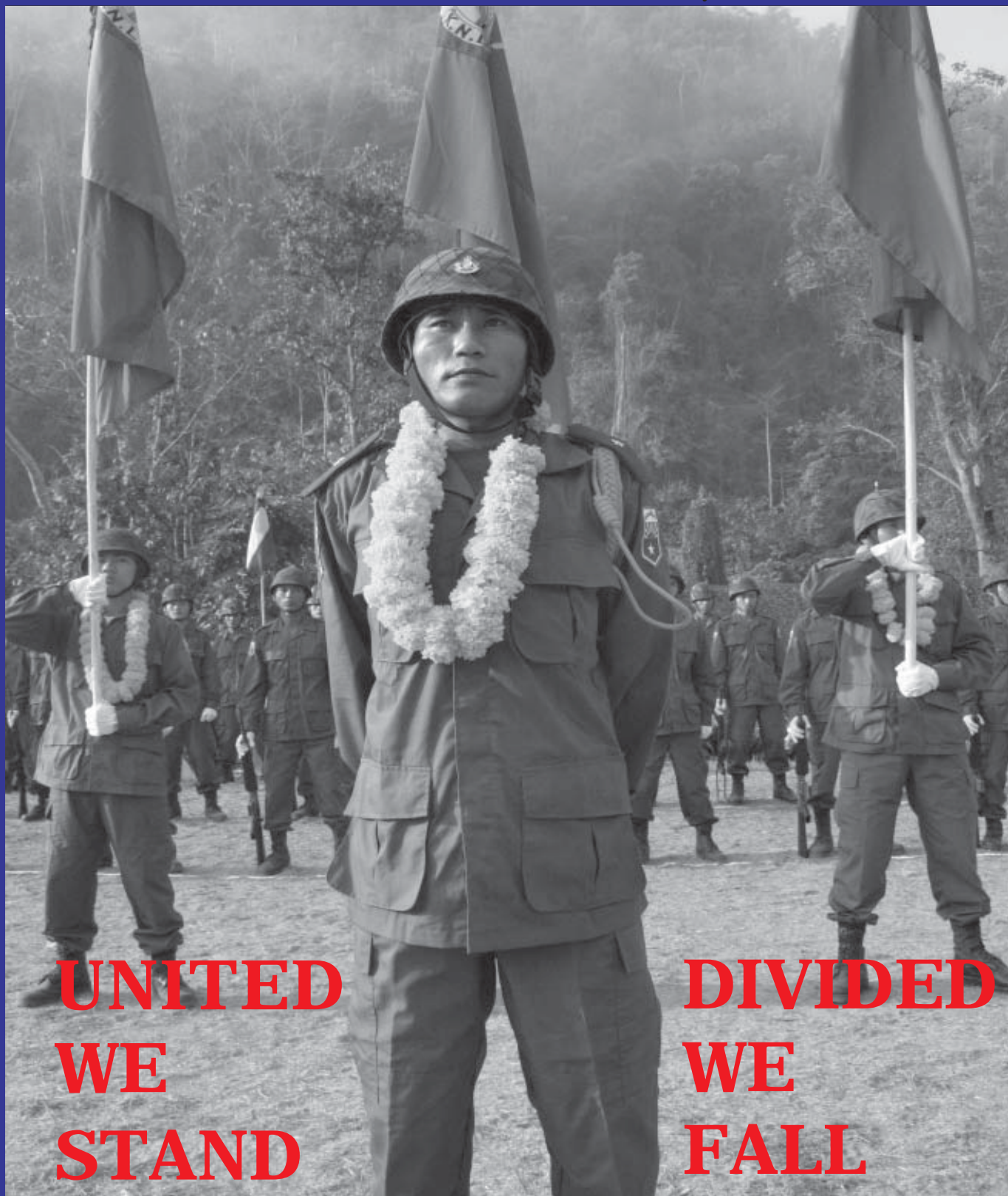
# Inside News

Volume 2

Issue 7

January - March

2006



**UNITED  
WE  
STAND**

**DIVIDED  
WE  
FALL**

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


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# “United we stand, divided we fall”

The ethnic people and groups opposing the Burmese military dictatorship are struggling to loosen the strangle hold the regime has on the country and its people. The recent amount of foreign investment in Burma has been massive and it is this finance that keeps the regime in power.

Burma is not a poor country, it is resource rich, but has been plundered by the regime at the expense of the people of Burma.

*Time* magazine recently reported that: “In 1988, Burma boasted only \$89 million in hard-currency reserves, but by 2004, it held \$685 million.”

Most of this money has come from foreign investors eager to get their hands on Burma’s natural resources. China and India have signed deals worth millions of dollars for Burma’s oil and gas resources. Thailand also increased its natural gas imports from Burma in 2005 by more than 22 per cent.

The people of Burma will not reap any benefit from this invested revenue. The profits will go into the coffers of the regime or flow out of the country to the bank accounts of foreigners. The present economic situation for most Burmese is dire. Most Burmese towns rely on clapped out generators for power. Even hospitals can’t rely on the government for their electricity needs. While the regime sells its large oil reserves to foreign energy-hungry nations - China, India and Thailand - the price of petrol in Burma has reached new highs.

Environmentalists warn that agreements signed with Thailand to build hydroelectric dams on the Moei and the Salween rivers will destroy forests, fishing grounds, the livelihoods of indigenous people and cause large scale displacement. Karen National Union president Saw Ba Thin, called for all the people of Burma to stand together to oppose the regime.

“As long as the military dictatorship points their guns at us we have to keep struggling. We are walking a tightrope, it’s a hard place to be, and we ask the international investors not to deal with the dictators.”

## MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

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





## Regime deny Karen health and education

Wee Dah doesn't know how old she is. She is a Karen from Htee Baw Day village. She takes pride in wearing the traditional dress that young girls wear until they get married. Wee Dah is a displaced person who was forced with her family from her home. They now hide from the Burmese military. There are about thirty families hiding out at Htee Baw Day village.

The village doesn't have a school. Wee Dah says.

"I have never been to school, except for a couple of months. I loved it. Now I work with my parents."

Many children in Karen State have the same problem. Villagers want to set up a school at the village, but they don't have enough food or enough money to buy rice or pay for a teacher.

The village headman from Htee

Baw Day says a lack of education places a big disadvantage on the village.

"We want to build a school, but we do not have enough food or money. Another problem is that we live in a mixed administration area that makes it very difficult for us." The headman claims villagers are desperate for their children to get an education.

"They try as hard as they can, some send their children to a refugee camp, some to a bigger town, but few of our children get to go to school. Many of our children want to learn, but they don't have a chance living like this."

Wee Dah agrees.

"I wanted to attend school, but my parents could not afford to pay for it. When I was young I went to a refugee camp and wanted to go to their school so much." Wee Dah went to school with her new friends for two month, but her

parents were not happy living at the camp because they felt that they were jobless and had no work to do there. They returned to Htee Baw Day with Wee Dah.

Wee Dah says.

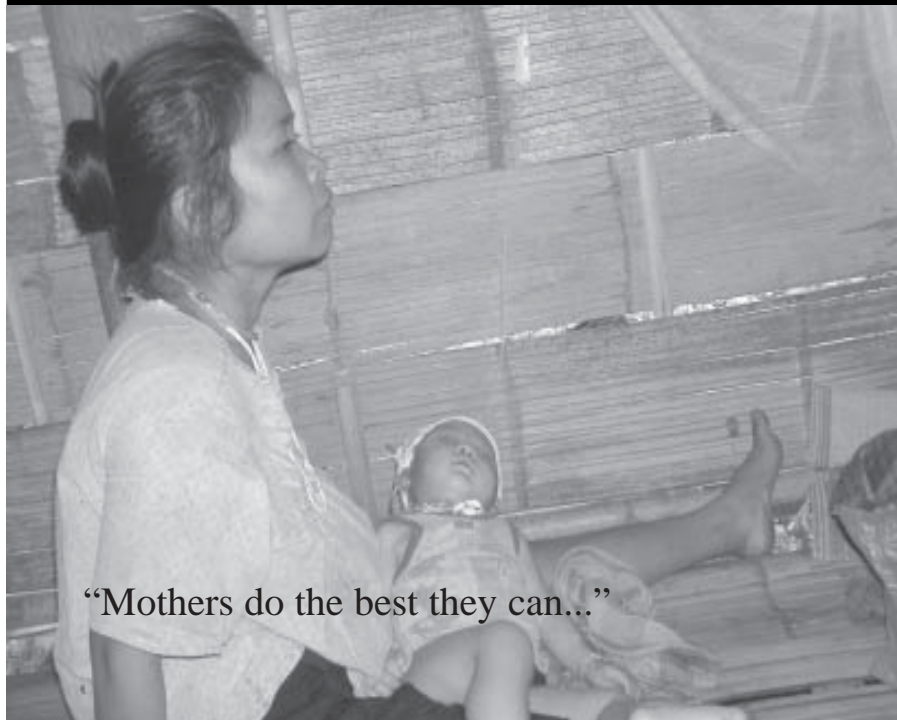
"There are many Karen girls like me who cannot go to school. Not only here in Htee Baw Day village. Many girls get married when they are only 14 or 15."

According to Wee Dah many of the girls say they married young because they didn't get an education.

"We get married here so early and many girls say 'when our children grow up they can help us and that will make life easy for us'.

Karen leaders say the strain of hiding and surviving on displaced people will have diasterous, long lasting effects on the standard of education and health of their people.

# The health costs of a sick government



“Mothers do the best they can...”

A new health report on Burma, by Johns Hopkins University (US), says the Burmese government spends “less than \$1 per person per year” on education and healthcare. This is one of the lowest levels in the world. The effect of this disregard for people can be witnessed in Karen State. **Inside News** reports from Ler Per Her Clinic.

Babies as young as six months, their heads wrapped in white cloth to protect the IV lines attached to their temples, cry.

Sar Oo, a nurse at the clinic says. “At the moment we’re managing malaria, but chronic diarrhea and cholera cases are on the increase. Most of the babies we see are suffering from diarrhea. All the babies here have either diarrhea or cholera.”

Sar Oo says the Clinic is low on medicine to treat their small patients. We don’t have any oral dehydration solution (ORS) to give

them. We’re mixing sugar with a little salt, it’s the best we can do. Our next supply of medicine is three months away”

Clinic staff says most of their patients are internally displaced people who hide in the hills near Ler Per Her.

A villager from Loe Lar Lei, who took his baby to Ler Per Her Clinic says.

“I have been at the clinic for five days now. We have no medicine or natural healer in our village.”

Hill villagers coming to the clinic have to hike enormous distances over mountains and rivers. By the time they get to the Clinic their children are often unconscious.”

Nurse Sar Oo says.

“We supply them with some food and they cook for themselves. If we have fish paste and curry we share with them and we all eat together.”

According to a nurse at the clinic, people forced from their traditional

villages are not able to care for themselves properly.

“They have to hide in the jungle. It’s hard to maintain personal hygiene and sanitation is poor, especially in the rainy season. Diarrhea and cholera breakout because parents have to work at secret farms and have no time to look after their children.”

The nurse said children have to fend and cook for themselves.

“Children play on the ground and do not clean their hands when they eat, infections are easily spread.”

Nurse Sar Oo says she would like to have medicine and the facilities to treat her people properly.

“If we do not have enough medicine we cannot do anything for them.”

The John Hopkins report warns that unless there are massive governmental changes and increased pressure from regional countries the health of the Burmese people will continue to deteriorate.







## Soldier, Medic sets an example

Name - Saw Swe Tun Kyaw

Age - 23 years old.

Resident - Pa Kha village, Lu Blai Township, Pa-an District.

Occupation- former soldier, he now works as medic at Ler Per Her clinic.

Saw Swe Tun Kyaw is a Karen, who wants to work for his people. His father was a freedom fighter. His father now works for the Karen revolution.

Saw Swe Tun Kyaw says.

"I am an only son, I left my mother at our village and came here to help my people. I joined the Karen army when I was 19, not by force, I volunteered. In my village people were forced to work as porters, we were beaten and treated like slaves by the Burmese army. In one month, six villagers [forced labourers] were given only three tins of rice. For this reason, I could

not endure to see my people suffer anymore and I joined the Karen revolution. I believe my decision was not wrong. My mother did not accept it because I am the only son. I joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion and worked for three years until my leg was blown off."

Saw Swe Tun Kyaw was hit by a landmine one of his friend's planted.

"I was injured and shot at on a Sunday. Burmese troops were out patrolling and opened fire on us. We were afraid that the enemy would come to our camp so we quickly turned around and headed back. On the way back I trod on a landmine that our troops planted three years ago. I did not know they planted it --- it is my fate. After I got injured, they carried me to Ler Per Her Clinic and then to Mae La refugee camp and then onto Mae

Sot. I stayed at Mae Sot Hospital for more than a month. I was discharged and returned to my work.

Saw Swe Tun Kyaw was now disabled and Karen leaders urged him to work at the Clinic.

"I'm now a medic, it is also not by force but voluntarily."

Saw Swe Tun Kyaw says he has a message for his younger Karen brothers and sisters. "Soldier work is not the only work of our people. Being a medic or teacher is also important for our people. I work here not by ancestry but as a volunteer."

Saw Swe Tun Kyaw says his disability does not mean he is not valuable.

"I would like to contribute as much as possible to our struggle. I choose this way to serve my people."





## Born to run

Karen villagers forced from their villages and homes by Burmese soldiers are in dire need of food, clothes and security. Hiding in forests and jungles with only rough ground for beds and trees for shade. The forests have become their towns and wild animal paths their roads. They live in fear and grab fitful sleep, prepared to run from Burmese soldiers.

Naw Ma Chat, from Kwee La village in Nyaw Linbin District says.

“When the soldiers come closer, our security warns us and we have to move our rice and other useful things.”

In September 2005, a Burmese army battalion of about 350

soldiers and led by their commanding officer Tin Toe Aung took over Kwee La villager for two months. They destroyed houses, ripped out bamboo floors, walls, and roofs. Villagers escaped to the nearest village, Kler Kee, a two-hour walk, over mountains.

A Karen woman documenting human rights abuses claimed the villagers had no choice but to take refuge in the jungle.

“We climbed up the mountain for two hours; we built temporary huts and stayed there for two months. Young kids faced disease, students had to study in the jungle and the pregnant women gave birth while running.”

The woman said the Burmese soldiers stayed in the villager for six weeks.

“They stole and ate all the pigs, chicken and vegetables. They left after destroying every single house.”

A woman from Kwee La village said the soldiers were cruel.

“They dug pits under our houses and built a sharp wood staked trap inside. They covered the pit with a bamboo mat and banana leaves and lay rice on top. Pigs driven by hunger came to eat and fell into the hole and died on the stakes.

The Kwee La villagers said it was hard for the students to settle down to study in the jungle.

*continue next page*

Naw Paw Wah, 14, one of 32 students hiding said.

“While living like this we are not so interested in studying as we were in the village. We have to worry when we might have to run again. We have to do without our clothes and we don’t have much to eat.”

Naw Paw Wah said their first priority is to protect themselves from insects and mosquitoes.

“I have just recovered from malaria and I don’t want to get dengue fever or malaria again.”

Naw Ma Chat, a mother with two children said she was pregnant at the time the soldiers forced them to flee.

“When I ran I was eight-months pregnant and after a month in the



jungle I gave birth. Villagers have returned to their village [Kwee La], but I will stay here as it’s too far for me to walk with my new baby. The soldiers destroyed our house so we’ll have to rebuild it.”

The woman said if the soldiers returned the villagers are prepared to move again.

“In 2005 we had to run four times. They have taught us how to run - it became our best lesson.”

## Never too old to learn



When the evening sun sets over the Ler Per Her school playground, busy teachers move between young men and women and children. Some are holding notebooks others sit or lie on the ground.

“This year if I pass my examination, I will be very happy,” said Saw Eh Doh Si.

“I am sixteen years old, but still have to do third standard. If I do not pass this exam my parents will not allow me to attend school.”

Saw Eh Doh Si adds that he started school at the age of 12.

“When I was four years old I went to school but the situation was not good for me. So I had to stop and I

lost my chance. I wanted to go to school so much my mother took me to Ler Per Her School.”

Saw Eh Doh Si says he was much older then the other students.

“They teased me a lot, but I didn’t care. My teachers are good they encouraged me to learn.”

Saw Eh Doh Si, says there is no shame in being an older student.

“I’m happy. If it is possible I would like to attend school up to tenth standard. When I see some people becoming interpreters for foreigners I would like to work like that.”

Saw Eh Doh Si urges other Karen men and women not to be ashamed to learn.

“I want to encourage my younger brothers and sisters to try hard to learn as they will be the future strength of our Karen nation.”



# My story



**Naw Shar Mlu** 30 a Karen Baptist relates her life story for *Inside News*.

I was born on Sunday, 23 October 1975. When I was eight months old it was the time the Burmese military started their *Four Cuts* operations against the Karen people. [The aim of the operation was to deny village support for the Karen Army. Areas were designated into zones either hostile or neutral to the Burmese regime. Villagers caught in classified 'Black Zones' were shot on sight.]

My parents moved to Maw Chi when I was eight and I began my studies. When I was 14 my parents returned to my village and to our farm. My family are

hill farmers. A year later my mother died. My father looked after us but we were very poor. The strain of caring for the family wore out my father and four years later he died. I have five brothers and sisters. My older sister and my elder brother got married. But my three younger sisters are still single. We faced many difficulties just to live. In April 1996, when I was 19, I got married. Two months later, the Burmese army started harassing us again. On 10<sup>th</sup> of June, we were forced to relocate to Maw Chi. When we arrived at Maw Chi we found there was no work we could do so we returned to our village. The army had burnt down all our homes and

destroyed the village. We fled to the hills and stayed hidden deep in the jungle. On December 30, my first daughter was born in the jungle. I did not have any medicine but luckily everything was okay. A year later we managed to survive by growing rice and vegetables and on Sunday 23 of August, my son was born. When he was five months old, my husband went fishing with his two friends. Burmese troops caught them. The Burmese troops released my husband's friends but not him. The Burmese soldiers forced him to follow them and work as their porter for two weeks.

I feared my husband would be disappeared for good. I felt so



sad. I could not sleep or eat. But, by the grace of God, my husband returned. But it was only for a short time. His brother who stayed at Pa Soung came to our house and said the Burmese troops that forced him to porter returned to their camp.

His brother told us if we didn't leave immediately we would be caught, but the Burmese troops came and forced my husband to work for them for one and half months before releasing him. When my husband came back I was very happy. We stayed at Pa Saung for six years, three children were born but I lost two daughters in childbirth.

In November 2005, armed militia, from the Karenni Solidarity Organization (KnSO), an armed group aligned to the Burmese regime started fighting with the opposition army, the

KNPP. KnSO soldiers came to our house and called my husband to follow them to their leader. I never saw my husband again. I wanted to go and see my husband, who I loved, but the KnSO wouldn't allow me. Since then, every day and every night my tears flow from my eyes. Everybody was very happy because it was Christmas. I could not be happy knowing they had my husband. Two weeks later, I heard that he had been sent to Loikaw prison. I still hoped if he was in prison we could be one day reunited. After Christmas, I heard the KnSO had killed my husband. My heart is filled with sadness. I wondered how I would keep on living, how could I feed my children? How could we survive?

It was a difficult time for me. My youngest son was only nine

months. At that time I thought that if I moved to a refugee camp, it would be better for us. I met with my first cousin who lived in Mae La Oo camp in Thailand. I followed her back to Mae La Oo camp. But the camp did not accept me. I went to Mae Ra Moe camp. It was very difficult for me because I did not know anyone at the camp. The camp leader and elders accepted me I was very thankful to them.

It has been 10 years since my marriage to my beloved husband. Since his death, my tears have never stopped flowing from my eyes. I cannot say when my worries will be gone, but I am pleased that everything is in the hands of God. Finally, I ask your readers, to please remember, my three children and me, in their prayers. Thank you.







# United we stand divided we fall!

Some people do not understand our revolution. Some say it creates nothing but widows. But we are lucky we can still fight for our freedom. Some hands want to shoot, but they can't, and that is why we are fortune."

— Saw Bo Lo, second-in-command of Karen National Defense Organization from Kler Lwee Htu district.



## Saw Bo Lo

Our 57-year revolution has shown the world we have the courage to persevere and to decide our own political destiny.

— Saw Ma Blut, 38, Third  
Brigade.



**Saw Ma Blu (Right side)**

“We feel that today, we celebrate Revolution Day in an unsatisfied way. We would like every Karen person to celebrate. We have to tell everyone about our revolution. We also have to tell our

revolutionaries our fight is for the benefit of the Karen.

— Lt. Colonel Pu Ka Hsu



**Pu Ka Hsu**

I am happy on this Karen Revolution Day for this anniversary is the first I have celebrated. I am surprised to see so many Karen people gathering and appearing on this special day. I feel proud that even if many of my people have been sacrificed for our independence, we still have many more willing to do so. We are Karen so we have to encourage each other.

—Saw Law Ben, 22.



I come to encourage those who make sacrifices for our people. When they see us, they will feel strengthen in their duty. I also feel very proud seeing many Karen soldiers and the large crowd come to celebrate our 57 year Karen Revolution Day anniversary.

— Naw Pu Kaw, 40.

As I am Karen I come to Revolution Day to show my commitment and peace. I appear in public with our people to become the spirit and strength for our soldiers. I love my people and always feel happy. If I am handed the duty to be a soldier at the frontline, I am willing to go. I am ready to help my people.”

— Saw Ler Gay, 18, from Mae La refugee camp.



## Saw Ler Gay

Being a soldier at the time of the celebrations on Karen Revolution Anniversary Day is special. When I see the soldiers and the Karen people together I feel encouraged for our future.

Saw Maw Thow, a soldier who has been a soldier for 13 years.



## Saw Maw Thow

# Resisting the regime

Many Karen people forced from their homes by the Burmese army refuse to give up. They take to the hills and the jungles. Despite landmines, torture and being forced to labour for the military they find ways to resist the regime and maintain their dignity.

Naw Tay is one such woman. She and her husband left their village because the Burmese army soldiers burnt their home and stole their possessions.

“We’re afraid of the Burmese and the DKBA (a Karen militia armed by the regime). When they come to our village they took our rice, even our clothes, they left us with nothing. We were frightened.”

Naw Tay says the Burmese soldiers have no discipline.

“They do what they want; they take the clothes of the back of old people. Now they have nothing, except a few pots. The situation in our country is not good but we still

have to live there. It’s no way to live, but we’re happy.”

Naw Tay says villagers have to bear the brunt of the Burmese army aggression.

“If there’s fighting between the Burmese and the Karen, the Burmese shoot the villagers.

Naw Tay stays with more than 200 Karen people in a jungle hideout.

“We have 76 children with us, but we don’t have a school. We need money to set up a school. We can supply the wood for the floor and the roof, but we need wooden poles, blackboards, teachers, books, pens and food for the students.”

Naw Tay says the villagers have learnt not to keep their food supplies near their homes.

“If the soldiers come they steal or burn our rice, vegetables and chickens. Our paddy is about two hours walk from here.”

Naw Tay slowly empties her large pannier of vegetables.

“I spent about an hour gathering all this. We grew most of it. This is a result of what we planted last year. We have la tha (fruit), nwe wah (potato), baw kay (taro) and taba (a green leaf vegetable). We don’t have enough good soil to grow the rice we need.

Naw Tay laughs and says it is hard to find money in the jungle.

“There’s no job and we’re short of chilli, salt and oil, but we don’t have money to buy them, unless we can find wild foods like bamboo shoots and mushrooms to sell across the river in Thailand.”

The small cluster of bamboo huts, are nothing more than basic shelters, but that hasn’t stopped the people from working hard to keep them clean. Using handmade brooms children sweep the area.

Naw Tay smiles and says.

“I have only one son. My other babies died in childbirth or from sickness.”

The harshness of her life is etched in the lines on her face. Her body is hardened by work, walking and digging. Naw Tay’s husband, Saw Shwe Htun (Golden light) joins us and smiles.

“Women work harder than men, they’re bigger and stronger.” Saw Shwe Htun says the villagers worship flowers.

“We offer food to the spirit of the flower, any flower, like sunflowers. In our old village we had plenty to eat. We even had tigers and bears and we had to be careful of the bears. They were very fierce. But Karen people fear DKBA and Burmese soldiers more than wild animals.”







# Burma Army tortures villagers

In February 2006, Burmese soldiers detained and beat to death Karen villagers they accused of helping the Karenni army. Fearful for their safety, eight Karen families, long-time residents of Karenni State, fled to Thailand. One of the arrested, Saw Nu Nu from Pa Haw Ko village said. "I was arrested by 428 Battalion. When I was released I took my family and fled to a refugee camp. Back in Burma we were persecuted by the army." The families are now safe and living in Mae Ra Mo refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border. Saw Nu Nu says the increased Burmese military presence is a result of the regime shifting their military headquarters from Rangoon to Pyinmanar.

"At the beginning of 2006, we noticed a lot more soldiers in our area. They started accusing us of belonging to opposition armies, Fearful for our lives, about 70 of us ran to Thailand and are now living in Mae Ra Mo camp." Saw Nu Nu says soldiers arrested him at 8pm on the night of the 16<sup>th</sup> December. "They beat me and tortured me with [live] electric wires. The electric knocked me unconscious and when they stopped I was told if I didn't want more of the same I had better spy on my friends for them." Saw Nu Nu says other village men and women were also beat by the soldiers. "Some villagers ran away, nine villagers were beat all through the

night, five were released and four made to carry arms and supplies. The soldiers killed one of the porters, Saw Eay Htai, in the jungle. When Saw Nu Nu was released he warned his friends. "We waited until the soldiers were asleep before running away. I fled alone. The next day the other members of my family ran to another village. Later on we met and together we fled to the refugee camp. We could not suffer any more." Saw Nu Nu named other villagers beaten by the Burmese soldiers. "Naw Kulu was beaten severely until he bled from his nose and his jaw was broken. Saw Su Su was struck with a gun on his head *continued next page...*

## RESISTING

*From page 13*

and was badly hurt. At the village there is no medicine or medics to treat them, situation is not good, I don't know whether they will die or live."

Popular Karen singer, K'Nyaw, says. "When I saw how our people suffered I felt very sorry. It made me sad until my tears fell, but I could not do anything for them. God will help our people gain their country, the freedom and help our people stand on their own feet."

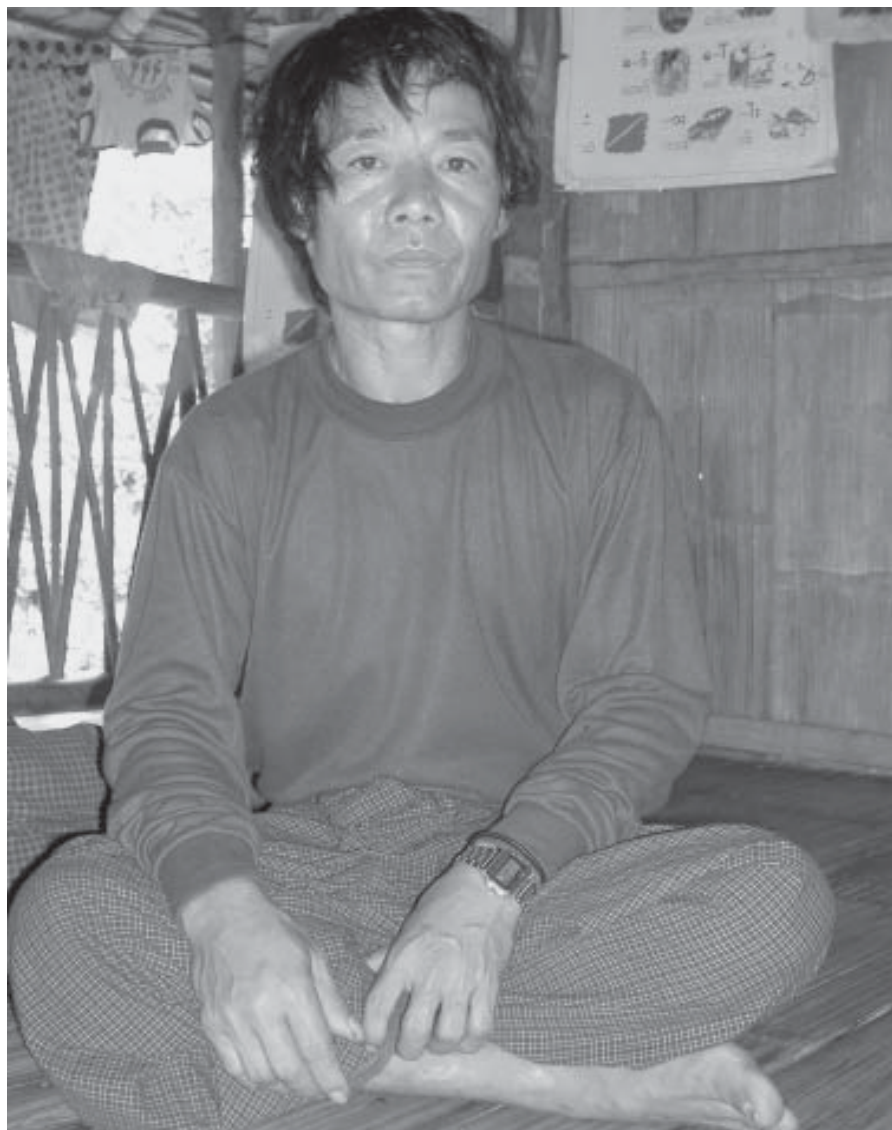
According to Saw Nu Nu living in the jungle meant village children could not go to school.

"Day by day we have to look for the food. It is very difficult. The jungle is not a safe place for us. My future hope is [that] my children get a good education here in the camp."

Saw Nu Nu says he does not plan to go back to his village.

"If I go back, I will die. The Burmese troops recorded our names. I can live here. If the other people stay here."

udky/vbftdunp tuplf



## Heart Trouble

Sam Nyein Ag is only 13 months old, yet he has a serious heart problem. His heart is twice the size it should be. Sam's parents brought him to Mae Tao Clinic for treatment. Back home in Burma getting help for Sam was impossible. Burma has one of the world's worst health records. The military dictatorship spends about half of the annual budget on its military and about one percent on education and health. A medic at Mae Tao Clinic said if Sam doesn't have specialist treatment he will die.





In April 2004 *Inside News* visited a burnt out jungle clearing to talk to a young teacher about her dreams and hopes. Our reporters went back two years later to see how she was doing.

Naw Norin says dreams do come true. The young teacher says it's great to have a school to teach in.

"Two years ago we had nothing but a burnt field now look at this. We have 47 children."

Naw Norin says when they first came to Law Thi Hta the people had nothing.

'We were forced from our homes. Many of our people live in the jungle and getting a education is hard.'

Norin says there is no security and few opportunities for



*We did it!*

# School of Dreams

Karen children.

'My hope for the future is that we extend the school to help older students.'

Norin says she is lucky she has the help and experience of the headmistress to rely on.

'Naw Htoo Lar is my aunt and is a very respected teacher. We're lucky to have her.'

Norin says they get small help from donors.

'It's difficult. Because we are on this side of the border NGOs are unable to fund us. We need books, pens, teaching materials and hope.'

Headmistress Naw Htoo Lar says she is grateful Norin is helping teach.

"Our children need a foundation in their lives, they have come

here from many different places. Scattered by the Burmese army like leaves in a storm."

The teachers are determined the children of Law Thi Hta will

have an education.

"We have to hope. We can't give up. The children will have nothing if we do. Their dreams are our dreams."





## Uncertain futures

Ma Mya and Saw Mya, eight-month old twins, are new to the world, but already their future is bleak. Both their parents earn their living as hillside vegetable farmers.

Saw Ter Hai, the twins father, says. "I'm an hill farmer. Every year I do this work, but this year, my two children were born at the time when I was supposed to be clearing the grass for planting. At harvest time the little rice I get will not be sufficient to feed us for the whole year."

Saw Ter Hai says he will now have to depend on distilling alcohol to make money for his family.

"To buy salt and fish paste I will have to cook alcohol."

According to Saw Ter Hai in his village, Kler Kart, there are 20

other families in similar circumstances. Some depend on selling betel nuts and betel leaves at Mae Tha Rae, a five-hour walk to Thailand. The money they hope to get from selling their produce will be used to buy salt and fish paste.

Saw Ter Hai said this year he has nothing to sell, except the alcohol or jungle vegetables he hopes to find.

"If it were not for cattle traffickers who buy it I'd have nowhere to sell it - I get 20 baht for a bottle. I can only make five or six bottles from my small cooking pot."

Saw Ter Hai says he earns about 500 baht a year and now he has twins to look after it will be extra hard on the family.

"Their mother does not produce enough milk and I have no money to buy milk for them. We need help. I'm happy to have my babies, but I worry about their future."o

*From page 17....*

with rice and eat it." We needed to buy rice; salt and fish paste but we didn't have money.

Saw Aris Htoo says he had enough of the constant harassment.

"It was too hard to stay at Klay Khee. We fled to Le Khee in Mu Tran District, but again the soldiers came. We had enough suffering so we fled to Mae Rar Moo refugee camp in Thailand. It took us four days walking to get there."o



# Villagers forced out by soldiers

Burmese soldiers from Toungoo District blocked Klay Khee villagers from working their farms and carrying their food to markets. A newly married couple, Saw Ais Htoo, 25, and Naw Ah Khn Paw, 23, used to live at Klay Khee village.

Saw Aris Htoo says the harassment against villagers by the Burmese soldiers increased until he and his wife could not stand it any longer. "We fled to a refugee camp to get away. To eat our daily food we had to travel to a remote place to buy it. We'd try to carry our food to our village, but the Burmese troops would stop us and steal the food." Saw Aris Htoo claims the government soldiers would also

force villagers to be unpaid laborers for the army.

"If the villagers heard SPDC troops entered our area, especially the men, we'd flee into a safe hiding place. If we were caught we would be persecuted".

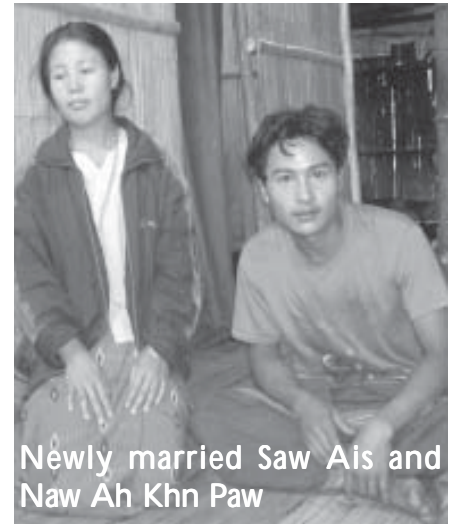
Saw Aris Htoo says the soldiers also made it impossible for villagers to work their farms.

"At the harvest time the Burmese soldiers came and destroyed or burnt our crops. When they entered our village and saw our paddy barns [rice stores] they'd burn it down. They'd kill and eat our animals. In 1997 they burnt down the whole village of Klay Khee, including the Baptist church and

wouldn't allow people out to get food".

"We never have enough food to eat. During the rainy season we'd pick bamboo shoots and boil them

*continue to page 16.....*



Newly married Saw Ais and Naw Ah Khn Paw

## Living with the enemy



Bu Sa Khee village  
Saw Lar Ka Baw Moo

The villagers of Bu Sa Khee in Toungoo District were terrified when Burmese soldiers set up a permanent camp near their village. It was not long before the soldiers started persecuting people. They burnt down Bu Sar Khee village, forcing villagers to flee to the jungle. The Burmese soldiers

destroyed the paddy barns, burning the rice supplies, leaving villagers without food.

Some villages were targeted and shot on sight. Saw Lar Ka Baw Moo, 22, told *Inside News* about the day he was to be married.

Saw Lar Ka Baw Moo went with his friends to get the food to feed the wedding party. On the way Burmese troops saw them and shot at them, luckily no one was injured. Being shot at is not unusual for villagers from Bu Sar Khee. When they go to the stores at Kaw Thay Du Township to buy food supplies Burmese Army soldiers harass them.

According to Saw Lar Ka Baw Moo villagers are never able to buy enough supplies.

"Most of the time we have only boiled rice to eat."

Villagers say it is also difficult for them to send their children to town to school.

"We can't work to earn a living and this means we don't have money for school fees, food and clothing." Being unable to settle means the villagers can't plan to build schools or churches or temples. Many villagers' sick of the constant threats and persecution have fled to the mountains or across the border to refugee camps.

"If we build anything the Burmese troops come and destroy it. The Burmese soldiers are very active and we always have to run and hide. Our children have no chance to get an education here."o

# They burned our village



The Burmese army attacked the village of Hee Dor Kor on 28 November 2005. They burnt the villagers' houses, clothing and food stores. Without shelter the villagers had no way of protecting their old and young from the elements.

A villager from Hee Dor Kor, Saw Willer Htoo says the army is attacking and destroying many villages in the area.

"Our village was destroyed by the Burmese soldiers. We faced many food problems. I could not buy and carry foods because the troops blocked the road and we did not dare to pass to the stores."

Without shelter or security the villagers stayed in the jungle. It was cold. Villagers say the biggest problem they face is from the Burmese army soldiers who destroy their crops and food.

According to villagers patrolling Burmese soldiers plant land mines in their fields and on the roads they use to travel to shops to buy food. Saw Aris Htoo from Klay Kee village says.

"We are very afraid. We have to find enough food to feed our families. We have to go to remote places and carry it. The troops block our way and make it very difficult for us. If the soldiers see us we will be arrested or forced to carry loads as porters."

When the villagers get warning that the Burmese soldiers are in the area they take to the jungle.

Saw Willer says the villagers' only friend against the Burmese is the Karen Army, but even that comes with a heavy price.

"When the Burmese army entered our place the Karen soldiers

planted landmines to help secure our village from attack, but Swa Pu Lar, 66, stepped on a land mine and was severely injured."



*A Hee Dor Kor's villager  
Saw Willer Htoo*





## Ceasefire doesn't stop abuses

Since February 2006, the Burmese Army has increased its operations in Toungoo District. Soldiers have ordered villagers from Than-Daung and Tan-Ta-Bin townships to carry military supplies, work at military camps, clear and labour on two motor roads in Kaw-Thay-Doe, Bu-Hsa-Khee, Kaw-Thay-Doe and Maw-Chi. New military bases have been set-up to control strategic points in the hill regions around Toungoo District.

Burmese soldiers forcibly confiscated cardamom, coffee, dock-fruit farms owned by agricultural workers in Than-Daung and Tan-Ta-Bin Townships. The Federation of Trade Union Kawthoolei (FTUK) has compiled a long list of crimes committed by the Burmese army soldiers against villagers in the area. These include: firing heavy weapon at villages; banning villagers from traveling and going out to buy food; stopping people from going to work; starting

forest fires to burn down betel nut, cardamom, coffee plantations and homes; torturing and executing Karen villagers on accusation of communicating with the Karen National Union; forcing villagers, including women, to work for free and forcing villagers to clear landmines. Villagers or their families are fined if Burmese army soldiers are injured by the landmines being cleared, die in the fighting or if military trucks are damaged by an exploding mine. The constant forced labour orders means villagers have no time to do their own work. Fed up with the abuses thousands of Karen people in Toungoo District have left their homes and villages to hide in the hills and jungles.

### FOR THE RECORD

**4 February 2006:** Soldiers from Light Infantry Brigade (LIB) 440 based at Kaw-Thay-Doe camp in Tan-Ta-Bin Township forced six men and nine women from Kaw-

Thay-Doe village to carry six sacks of rice to Naw-Soe military camp.

**7 February 2006:** Troops from LIB 35, LIB 14 and LIB 108 from Tactical Command 1, under LIB 66, went into Play-Hsa-Lo (Tate-Pu) village and forced 250 convicts to carry their food supplies. They ordered the convicts to keep the information about transportation of the supplies secret. They threatened to take harsh action against Play-has-lo (Tate-pu) villagers if the information was leaked. During transportation of military supplies, some of the convicts escaped into the jungle.

**2 to 5 March 2006:** Burmese army soldiers from LID 66, LIB 80 (under the command of Captain Kyaw Sein Ya) forced 80 villagers from Tha-Kweh-Plo, Tha-Hseh-Plo, Hta-Thaw-Po-Lee, Di-Dah-Ko, Htee-Tha-Saw-Hta and Htee-Tha-Saw-La to carry military and food supplies for the army from

*continued page 20*



*Continued from page 19*

Thauk-Ye-Khan to Htee-Tha-Saw military camps.

**1 March 2006:** Burmese army soldiers from LID 66, Tactical command 663, Major Tin Aung at Play-Hsa-Lo camp forced seven villagers – one woman and six men from Yer-Lo, and five women and three men from Plaw-Mu-Der to carry food supplies from Paw-Pa Taung to Play-Hsa-Lo camp.

11 to 13 March 2006 Burmese army soldiers from LID 66, Tactical Command 663 under Major Tin Aung forced 40 (31 men and nine women) villagers from Yer-Lo, Ka'Moo-Lo, Lay-Oh and Play-Has Lo to carry military rations from Play-Has-Lo to Zya-Gyi camp.

**13 March 2006:** Burmese army soldiers from LID 66, Tactical command 663, LIB 35 and No 2 column led by Zaw Nay Myo

forced villagers to carry military supplies and food supplies for three days from P'Let-Wa to Klaw-Mee-Der military camp: The total of men and women was: 78 (60 men and 18 women) from Klaw-Mee-Der; 27 (17 men and 10 women) from Hu-mu-Der; 30 (22 men and eight women) from Ler-Klah-Der. The Burmese army soldiers also stole 24 cattle owned by Klaw-Mee-Der villagers

**15 March 2006:** Commander of LID 66 Khin Zaw Oo forced all local trucks drivers at Kler-La, a total of 11 trucks to transport military supplies from Kler-La to Bu-Has-Khee camp.

#### **Army runs on slave labour**

**4 February 2006:** Burmese army soldiers from LID 66 and LIB 73,48,53 and LIB 599 from Southern Command headquarters forced villagers from Htee-Lo and Ka-Ser-Doh to work for them. The

troops stole and butchered the villagers' domestic animals for food.

**4 February 2006:** Bo Zaw Aung from LIB 48, based at Htee-Lo camp forced 38 villagers (17 men and 11 women) from Pler-Daw-Day to work at Htee-Lo army camp.

**7 February 2006:** Burmese army soldiers from LID 66 based at Eastern Play-Hsa-Lo, forced Play-Hsa-Lo(Tate-pu) villagers to work on the army camp construction.

**8 February 2006:** Bo Zaw Aung from LIB 48, forced 26 Ka-Ser-Doh villagers to work in the army camp making fences, cutting bamboo, cutting wood, making bamboo ropes and waiting on the officers and soldiers.

**8 February 2006:** Troops from LID 66, Yu-lo and Ka-Mwee-Lor villagers to work and spy on the KNU. Burmese army soldiers from



LID 66, operating in the Taungoo area stopped villagers from doing their own work or shopping. Villagers fled and hid in the jungle.

**10 February 2006:** Burmese army soldiers from LID 66, in Than-Daung forced Ler-Ge-Kho villagers to work at the Per-Doe-Kar Bridge construction.

**8 March 2006:** Burmese army soldiers from LID 66, Tactical command, Maj Aung Myint Oo forcibly demanded the villagers of Ker-Der-Kah, Kler-Pah-Htee, Ler-Gi-Ko to make 10,000 pieces of bamboo from each village and send to the military camp to make fence.

**9 March 2006:** Burmese army soldiers from Tactical command 661 Major Aung Myint Oo forcibly demanded 50 Zinc roof from the villagers of Ka' Thwee-Dee and Tha-Bah-Per.

#### Human mine sweepers

**30 January 2006:** The SPDC Southern Command Headquarter, Strategic Command 1, commander

Thein Htun ordered a person from each household in Kaw-Thay-Doe(Ye-tho-gyi) village, in Tan-ta-bin Township, to clear bushes and landmines on the motor road from Kaw-thay-doe to Bu-has-khee village.

**31 January 2006:** Burmese army soldiers from LIB 439 led by commander Aung Tun Oo demanded 30 villagers from Peh-kaw-doe in Than-daung Township to clear landmines on Maw-Chi motor road from Tha-aye-hta to Pimu-kho.

**March 2006:** Burmese army soldiers from LID 66 Tactical commander forced the villagers of Peh-Kaw-Der, Maw-Ko-Der, Ku-Plaw-Der, Der-Do, Gar-Mu-Der, Kaw-Thay-Der, Klay-So-Khee, Wa-Tho-Ko, Kaw-Soe-Ko, Ler-Ko, Maw-Pah-Der, Kler-La to construct the road and clear land mines from Kler-La to Maw-Chi and Kler-La to Bu-Has-Khee.

**January 2006:** Burmese army soldiers from SPDC IB 51, led by 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Shwe Than Oo, forced villagers from; (1) Pa-ta-la, (2) Noe-gaw, (3) Thoo-ka-bee, (4) Inn-net, (5) Ga-mon-aing and (6) Wet-lar-daw to clear bushes and land mines between Kyauk-Kyi and Klaw-maw.

#### They steal our food

Column 2 from Tactical command 663, LID 66 and ID 73, 48, 53 and LIB 599 from Southern Command headquarters ordered villagers from Htee-lo and Ka-ser-doh areas to provide them with domestic animals.

**February 2006:** The commander from SPDC Tactical Command 663, under LID 66, in Tan-ta-bin Township, demanded 1 sack of rice and chickens from each household of Yu-lo and Ka-mwe-lo villages and ordered the villagers to send them to Play-has-lo (Tate-pu) army camp. The villagers have to provide food supplies for the soldiers every month.



Burmese soldiers use Karen villagers as disposable labour



## What price freedom?

Saw Hay, 26, is a Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) sergeant from battalion 202, Brigade 7. He joined the Karen army in 1996, after he completed his studies.

Saw Hay says he joined the army because when he as a child he saw Burmese soldiers persecute villagers. Saw Hay said he and two friends were chased and shot at by Burmese troops and his two friends were killed.

Saw Hay says he was too young to take action against them, but never forgot. He says his willingness to fight is because his Karen people need to have the right to live and travel without fear. When he fled the

soldiers he felt great fear trying to survive in the jungle alone. "I had never been here before. I did not know the way to go. I was scared."

Saw Hay was lost in the jungle without anything to eat. He



survived by eating tree leaves. After wandering for four days he met a Karen soldier and was given water and rice.

Saw Hay's says the experience taught him to never give up no matter how difficult it is. He says he has many comrades like him who work together with the same objective to dedicate their lives for their people's liberation. "I would like us to gain freedom as soon as possible. The Karen people live in fear, work in fear and travel in fear. So many Karen people have been killed, persecuted and raped without reason. Thousands of our soldiers have sacrificed their lives for our revolution, we mustn't give up now."



# Freedom Fighter

Major General Silver, 77, has spent the last 56 years fighting for freedom for his Karen people. The old soldier lives in a small bamboo hut on the edge of Karen State. His eyes sparkle as he talks about his people.

"I'm 77 years old but I don't feel tired. Our war is just. We have right on our side. We're fighting gangsters who lack any morals."

Major General Silver speaks softly as he proudly talks of his young Karen soldiers and politicians.

"Young and old we all have different views about the ceasefire but we are all ready if it finishes. We're fighting for our land, we love our people."

Major General Silver is scathing of the Burmese army and their allies the armed DKBA militia.

"Their soldiers have nothing. They are completely controlled by the Burmans. The DKBA have no political experience, no political consciousness, they're officers are nothing more than gangsters in fancy uniforms."

The Major General rejects criticism that the Karen must be tired of the fighting.

"It's not about tired. We have to fight for our freedom. We have confidence in our young people, we trust them. Even if our people go overseas to live they are still Karen."

The old soldier's eyes harden when he talks about International non-government organisations who criticise his Karen army.

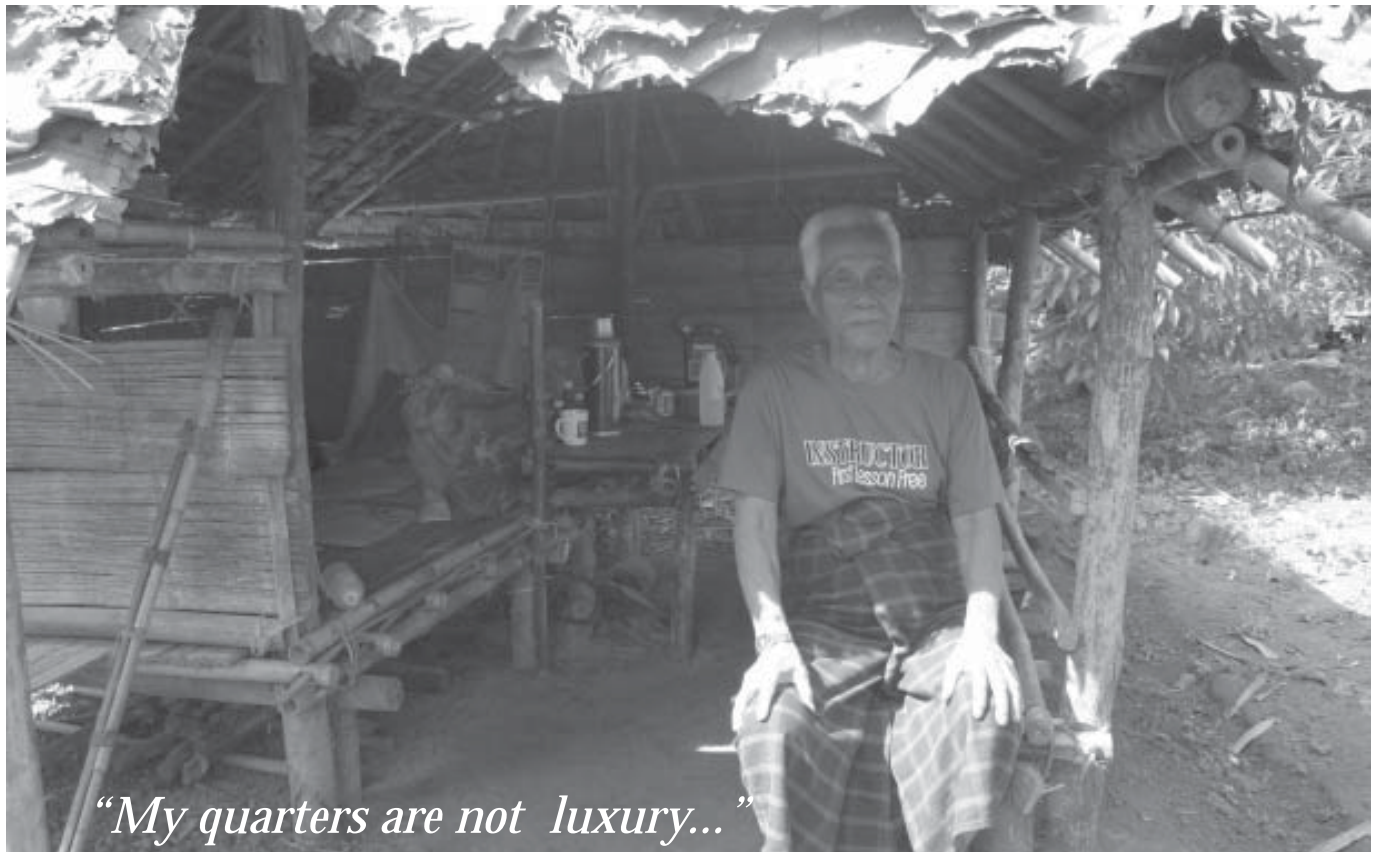
"They accuse us of being corrupt. Look around, there's not much wealth to steal."

The Major General's hut is basic. Water is bottled, food is scarce and his bed a simple platform. The Major General admits the Karen are not perfect.

"We have a few bad people, but most have sacrificed their comfort and their lives for the revolution. We never see NGOs over here if they come they're welcome."

Major General Silver says his people would have no chance without the security of the Karen army.

"We're protecting our people. Without us they cannot survive. Other countries have armies and police to defend their citizens. NGOs have double standards. They want protection for themselves and their staff, but deny our people the same."



*"My quarters are not luxury..."*

# New ginnings



32 years old Tin Shwe Oo, is of Burman ethnicity and used to believe in Buddha. He was born in Pyaw Bweh village, Maehteela in Mandalay division. He has got eight brothers and sisters and he is the second eldest. He attended the village school until he finished eight graded. After he left school, he became a goldsmith for five years and as a driver for two months. Keeping work was difficult in Burma and he soon found himself jobless. Tin Shwe Oo could not find any job so he worked for the Burmese regime.

Tin Shwe Oo says in 1993 he was looking for somewhere to live in Lweh Kaw village, in Karennie State, but he was caught by the Burmese army and questioned by the Burmese soldiers. They jailed him for two years.

He had been in jail for 8 months when he was ordered to porter the army's supplies at the frontline.

Tin Shwe Oo portered for three weeks until he decided to escape to a Karen village called Ko Khon in Mu Traw district. While avoiding

the Burmese soldiers he stepped on a landmine. Villagers from Ko Khon took him to a clinic where he was helped and cared for. In 1998 he relocated to Kho Khay village near the Salween River where he worked as a primary school teacher. After four years teaching he married a Karen woman and he change his religion from Buddhism to Christian. He now has a two-year-old son.

He says, "I used to do slash and burn farming, but the Burmese army destroyed the rice and burned down our village several times. I had to hide on the Thai side until the soldiers left. Now I earn my living by teaching and running a small shop – it's enough for my family".

Tin Shwe Oo says his memory of his old life disturbs him.

"It wakes me up and I want to return to my own village, where my parents and siblings live. But I dare not go back because of the army. I am married here with one child, so as long as we do not have any worries about our security, I love living here."