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Burma's Landmine Tragedy...

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



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The father of the Karen resistance

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Landmines have no friends

The Burmese military government constantly denies its woeful humanitarian record to the international community. Yet, in spite of its denials the regime still manages to top the world's worst lists: forced labour, human trafficking, illicit drugs, non-existent health system, child soldiers and the use of landmines. Even though the regime is a member to the United Nations General Assembly Conference of Disarmament it has never given any indication that it is willing to cut back on the use of landmines. Most of these mines are used not against armed resistance but against villagers to restrict their movement. Researchers from the International Campaign to Ban Landmines estimate 1,500 people in Burma a year are blown up by mines.

Behind these statistics are families – mothers, fathers, sons and daughters. Their lives shattered. Ethnic armed resistance, lacking the military strength to match the regime, use homemade mines to protect villagers from Burmese army attacks. But even these devices have the capacity to kill and maim friend or enemy. Landmines do not discriminate, they have no friends.

While gathering and writing this issue of *Inside News*, the ability these heinous weapons have to shattered lives was driven home to us. One of our student reporters, Margie Min (see story page 4) trod on a mine. The impact destroyed her left foot. She now lives and has to work minus her foot.

It looks like the people of Burma will have to put up with mines for a long time yet. In its latest report Landmine Monitor (2006) claims no humanitarian mine clearance programs currently exist in Burma. One of the worst and most disturbing use of landmines in Burma is the regime's use of people to clear landmines.

In August 2005, a UN spokesperson for the Commission on Human Rights said they were... “disturbed by reports of ongoing practice of ‘atrocious demining’ whereby civilians are forced to act as human minesweepers by the military, resulting in severe mutilation and sometimes death.”

MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

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



Human mine sweepers

Landmine Monitor Report says ethnic minorities are frequently being forced by the Burmese army to clear mines. The report says the International Labor Organization (ILO) is concerned with “the number of people taken into forced labor, particularly by the military, who have suffered “mutilations and violent deaths occurring during mine-clearing operations.”

In February 2005, the report says Burmese army Light Infantry Brigade 439 is alleged to have conscripted villagers to walk ahead to clear mines on the Toungoo-Mawchi road. Another brigade operating further south on the same road allegedly conscripted villagers to carry loads and walk in front of them to clear mines on the road between Kaw Thay Der and Busakee, resulting in one 15-year-old casualty.”

In mid-November 2005, the military ordered forced labor

from 20 villages on the Sittaung River plains to clear forest growth from both sides of a road between Shwegyin and Kyauk Kyi in Karen state.

“This 50 kilometer section of road was known to have mines placed along it by both the SPDC and KNLA in the past. To avoid the landmine hazard associated with clearing the brush, many of the villagers fled their homes.”

A report by the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) in March 2005 says the Burmese army ordered members of the People’s Militia (Pyitthu Sit) to “guide” them in areas suspected of being mined by the the KNLA. It also reported that the army ordered villagers along the Kler Lah-Bu Sah road to work on the road and to collect vegetables and wood from surrounding areas, despite the risk from landmines in the area.



Explosive

The Burma's 58-year-old civil war has turned the tropical jungles of Karen State into a villagers' nightmare strewn with deadly landmines. Phil Thornton recounts a recent incident involving one of Inside News journalist students.

Morning mist slowly lifted of the Dawna Ranges as student journalist and Mine Risk Educator Margie Min and her three friends followed the narrow twisting path that would take her deep into Karen State. Her mission, to carry out a landmine survey and write articles for *Inside News*.

Before leaving their base camp Margie, 21, had questioned her guides about the safety of the trail they would take. Experienced Karen soldiers said it was mined but reassured her it was safe, if she followed their advice – "no stepping of the track to pee, no kicking sticks and to follow the steps of the person in front."

Landmines are usually buried just at the sides of paths and walkways and are treacherous. They have no friends, attacking all. The monsoon rains move and uncover mines and it slips from memory how narrow (and slippery) these paths are --- 10 to 12 inches at most.

Margie's awareness of the horrendous damage landmines do to people had been heightened by the recent completion of a Mine Risk Educators training course.

The four young friends joked and teased each other as they set out. Less than fifteen minutes later their laughter was drowned by the explosion of a blast mine that pulped Margie's left foot and shattered her life, as she knew it.

Her friends, putting aside their own shock, quickly treated her, stopping the blood flow and carried her back to camp on the now gloomy track. She was

taken by car to Mae Sot hospital where she was X-rayed and the damage assessed.

According to the Royal Thai Army two thirds of the border between Thailand and Burma is landmined. Testimony to the destruction these heinous weapons do, are the hundreds of Karen villagers in refugee camps in Thailand who show the scars, missing eyes, arms and legs.

As a young reporter, Margie had interviewed landmine victims and knew all about the black holes of despair these people dropped into after their lives had been wrecked.

By the time I got to the hospital emotions were high. X-rays confirmed her left foot took most of the impact. Margie was prepared to fight and refused for her foot to be amputated. Saying she rather "live with the pain than lose her foot."

Doctors reasoned that the bone destruction, burnt nerves and tendons and ligaments gave them little choice. If she didn't agree she risked losing the whole leg. Mines are designed to drive dirt, stones

and clothing into the pulverized tissue to cause infections. Margie eventually relented and had to sign a hospital consent form that included the burning of the amputated foot.

I was stunned to see her 40 minutes after the operation sitting-up, talking, eating mandarins and scoffing chocolate milk. By early next morning she was trying out crutches and watching hip-hop dance DVDs. Her immediate worry – her boyfriend wouldn't want her now. It has only been three weeks since the landmine erupted into her once settled existence. But already she is starting to show the vibrancy of old and declares she wants to train to work on *Inside News* as a graphic artist. In spite of her horrendous injury Margie proclaims she still wants to be a journalist. In fact she did the layout on this page. There's no denying Margie has strength, guts and determination in buckets, but she will still need to depend on the love and support that only her Karen community can deliver.

Nightmares



**Danger!
Don't touch!**

Stop!
If you see warning signs,
don't go.



Reducing the risk of landmine injury

*A European NGO has spent the last year educating CIDKP staff to teach Karen villagers how to reduce the risk of death and injury from landmines. He explains his work to **Inside News**.*

Burma is a tragedy, no other country uses as many landmines as Burma, but in spite of that horrific statistic, no INGO are doing any de-mining there. Mine Risk Education (MRE) programs to reach and give assistance to mine victims inside Karen State and Burma is limited.

Since February 2006, CIDKP and some other local organizations have been involved in an project to survey mined areas using advanced Global Positioning System (GPS) equipment, writing socio-economic reports where de-mining is most needed, to find mine victims and record and report their situation for possible future aid and to give MRE in Karen villages close to nearby minefields.

It has been shown in other countries that following MRE in villages there is a fall in the number of mines accidents. MRE teaches people of the risks and how to modify their lives to avoid mine fields.

The first field report or survey from CIDKP describes an alarming picture of mine fields in Karen State. The minefields are massive, some up to several kilometres long. The worst offenders are the Burmese army who use landmines

produced in factories either in Burma, China or Russia. One of the most common mines used by the military regime's soldiers is the Burmese manufactured version of the US made M-14 mine.

Over the last decade or so many mine victims in Karen State fled to refugee camps in Thailand. CIDKP took the opportunity to interview them. When compared to mine victims in the camps, data collected from victims still inside Karen State, illustrates there are many more women and children maimed or killed than realised. One reason for this could be that a mine victim needs motorized transport and assistance to reach medical help in Thailand, something that maybe beyond the reach of a farming family or single person.

Soldiers have more chance of getting immediate support from an army medic, colleagues or their battalions to reach help.

CIDKP takes the position that all mine victims should be given urgent support and respect, irrespective of how they became a victim --- war or peace, or soldier or civilian. It is planned to have a new Mobile Prosthetic Clinic will help victims in Karen State who do not have the means to reach medical or post care facilities in other countries.

Beware landmines!

Mines are weapons. Unlike other weapons they are set-off by the victim. They know no friends. They are triggered by body contact or pressure. They destroy and mutilate body parts and kill. Once laid nobody has control over mines. They can stay buried and remain active for years, retaining their capacity to kill or mutilate. According to Aide Medicale Internationale (AMI) mine victims who survive become "assisted people within their health system and community." Landmines are a strain on local communities. The Burmese army buries them where they will do the most damage. This is a deliberate strategy. Fields cannot be farmed, river banks are unsafe for fishing, water systems are targets, village footpaths, roads and food stores are all mined to destabilise daily life, create economic hardship, scare villagers and restrict their travel movement.

A CIDKP Mine Risk Educator (MRE) put together a list for *Inside News* of areas where soldiers are likely to have laid mines. Villagers, if possible, should avoid these places at all costs.

Avoid the following places

1. Areas where fighting has taken place.
2. Around new or abandoned military camps.
3. Deserted or old villages.
4. Places where there are bones or dead animal bodies.
5. Places where there are scraps of military equipments and shells.
6. Unused old paths or overgrown grass paths.
7. Places where there are landmine signs or broken tree branches.
8. Under and around the main crossing bridges on car roads.
9. Places where armed groups stop over to rest.
10. If you are in known dangerous area and see a mound of soil, do not go further, retrace your footsteps carefully and go back the same way.
11. Do not go to checkpoint or blocked roads.
12. Be careful and alert when going to fetch water, keep to the path.
13. Do not walk on car roads that are far from any houses, village or towns.
14. Do not walk around fallen trees or rest spots besides roads.
15. Tripwires are linked to mines, don't touch.
16. Do not touch any strange objects!



CIDKP

Danger!
Abandoned villages and old
army camps are often mined.

KNU landmine policy

KNU general secretary, Pado Mahn Sha La Phan hit out at criticisms that Karens use landmines in the same way as the Burmese regime.

‘If we could solve our conflict by political means there would be no need for landmines or guns.’

Mahn Sha listed the KNU's six- point landmine policy for *Inside News*.

KNU LANDMINE POLICY

1. We use landmines to defend our people, our land and our base camps.
2. Our landmines are small, handmade plastic pipe or bamboo, they only have a six- month lifespan.
3. If the enemy attack, we use, when they retreat we remove them.
4. If we put landmines in, we inform villagers where they are.
5. Our landmines are small, they are designed to wound, slow the enemy and to delay their troop movements.
6. We don't want to use mines, but because of our situation - our army is small - we use with restriction.’

Mahn Sha said if the Burmese army stopped their attacks, the KNU would not use mines.

Pado Mahn Sha insisted the KNU have always wanted peace and their conflict was based on defending the Karen people.

‘If they stopped killing our people we wouldn't need to defend ourselves, within one year we could remove all Karen landmines.’

Mahn Sha said it is important the international community continues to pressure the regime to stop using landmines. Mahn Sha responded to critics of the KNU who say the Karen are not serious about stopping using mines.

‘If we could solve our conflict by political means there would be no need for landmines or guns.’

‘They have to keep it in perspective, the Karen use of



mines is vastly different than that of the Burmese military. They target civilians, we don't, our people can't go back to their villages because of Burmese mines. The Burmese have factories producing hundreds of thousands of mines.’ Mahn Sha said if political dialogue is genuine then peace is possible, but he warned.

‘We Karen have a saying, “when we make a door we need to make sure we use good wood. If we use bad wood we will have no security”. This applies to any ceasefire talks, we won't settle for anything less.’ Mahn Sha said the Karen are committed to a genuine peace.

‘Karen soldiers are the bravest. They deserve peace. Karen people have to keep struggling for our freedom, but I believe we will be successful.’

Landmine Monitor Report 2006

According to the Landmine Monitor Report 2006 produced by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines the Burmese military regime continues to use massive amounts of landmines indiscriminately against civilian populations. Landmine Monitor reports that “according to the UN, on 26 November 2005, 900 people fled Thandaung Township, Karen State, following a Myanmar Army attack that included burning civilian dwellings and laying landmines.” The report says that Human Rights Watch found that 2,000 mines were laid by the Burmese army to block escape routes and deny civilians access to food, consumer goods and humanitarian assistance.

Landmine Monitor says that “since January 2006, there has been an increase in the use of M-14 mines as the Myanmar Army has been systematically placing these mines on the main trails in the mountains in southern Karenni state and northern Karen State.”

Burmese government forces have laid mines to stop access to a small hydro-electric power dam is being built on the Sittang river near northeast of Toungoo district.

“Farmers have been displaced by the construction and the danger of mines in the area; some mines were alleged to have been laid in populated areas close to Mandalay division near Pynmana.”

Landmine Monitor says that in northern and central Karen State roads have been built into areas of previous conflict involving ethnic minorities and the Burmese army.

“These roads are heavily garrisoned and patrolled by the SPDC and frequently mined along the berm (roadside) to prevent unauthorized movement by the population. The Sor Hta road from Kyaut Kyi to Sor Hta on the Salween river bank, and the Papun-Kor Pu-Kyaut Nyat road in particular are reportedly mined on the berm, causing civilian casualties.” Landmine Monitor claims that the Burmese army added to the existing mine-threat in Karen State by increasing its mine laying activity there and along the Thai Burma border. “Reportedly, the purpose was to deter movement of local people. Here and in other parts of Burma, people can only move at great risk. In May 2006, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that in the previous three months some 2,000 refugees have fled “renewed conflict and human rights abuses in Kayin state...to find refuge in” northern Thailand. UNHCR added: “Many are very weak and suffering from illnesses such as malaria after a long, dangerous journey to the camps through heavily land-mined areas.”

The report says that in a 2005 survey of IDPs, which included some people hiding from the Burmese army, nine percent of respondents listed closeness to landmines as a serious threat.

“More than six percent of all respondents (and 23 percent of those in hiding) indicated that they had laid landmines to protect themselves.”



Where's there no doctor —



Lah Soe works with CIDKP as a Mine Risk Educator and reporter for Inside News. He has put together the following article to help villagers who may have to treat someone who has stepped on a landmine.

In Burma, it is common to see many civilians and soldiers who are missing eyes, legs or hands. What you don't see are the thousands of people who bled to death on village footpaths, in jungles or by rivers. Contrary to research by humanitarian groups and according to an International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) report, the Burmese military government claims there are no more incidents of mines from 2000 to 2006. A recent CIDKP mine survey conducted inside Burma also records many landmine incidents in Karen State. Ironically, our mine survey teams could only monitor part of Karen State because of the Burmese soldiers. Being caught is a death sentence. Being injured by a mine in the jungle where there are no medicine or doctors can be fatal. Villagers say they need to know what to do and how to handle the injury

immediately if they are to save the victim's life. Getting medical help can often take days of hard walking.

In May 2006, I met and talked to a medic from a Karen National Union stationed in Brigade 3 in Kler Lwee Htu District. He told me that during the 80s through to 1994-95 people used the "tourniquet" method (tying a rope to stop bleeding) for mine injury when there was no medic or doctor. Because of this, victims lost more of their leg than they should have i.e. when a leg could have been amputated below the knee, many were cut off above the knee.

When inside Burma in mid 2006, I talked with Naw Wah Poe, a villager from Poh Hgo Der Kler Lwee Htu District. She said she had a brother who stepped on landmine that blew off his foot, but he died, from blood lost.

When I got back to our CIDKP office I called a medic from the Backpack Health Workers Team to find out how to give first aid to a landmine injured person where there is no medicine or doctor.

— treating a landmine victim

Lah Soe warns that landmines cause many different injuries. It can be torn legs and pulped feet to internal organ damage. Here are his essential points that he says may make all the difference in saving someone's life.

- When a person has stepped on a landmine, we know for sure that there are more mines in the area.
- Be careful getting to the victim as it can risk other lives, including your own.
- Try to find someone who has first aid experience.
- Check the breathing. If the victim cannot breathe, clean his/her respiratory tract, i.e. clean out blood or anything blocking the airway, mouth or throat. This has to be done first as a victim can die within four or five minutes without air. Examine the victim for air movement.
- Keep the wound at a higher position than the heart.
- Look for the bleeding point and then try to stop the bleeding immediately if you nothing, tear and use your clothes.
- Press the main artery with your hands to stop bleeding. There are three main arteries: in the leg, it is at the upper thigh; of the hand/arm, it is at the

armpit and of the upper body it is at the throat.

- We should clean out dust and leaves from the wound. Get a piece of cloth and put into the wound. Wrap the wound to stop the bleeding
- Always check the pulse to see if it is too fast, too slower or has stopped.
- We also have to check the temperature of the victim. He/she cannot get too cold, so keep them warm.
- Send the victim to the village where there maybe a medic. If we cannot carry the victim, look for other people to help. Do it quickly.
- Check blood circulation and breathing often. Give limited food and fluids.
- Get the victim to a hospital and or a doctor as soon as possible.

These points are basic guides only where there is no doctor. Medic Naw Say Day from Mae Ra Mo refugee camp was a first aid trainer for the KNU in 2001. She says. "There are many cases where people stepped on a landmine and didn't know how to handle it without a doctor. Patient's often died of a minor injury caused by bleeding."



CIDKP

Soldiers destroy

The Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP) trained Karen workers to give Mine Risk Education (MRE) to villagers, survey mine areas, document case studies of mine victims and assess the overall landmine situation.

Two of the workers, Saw Min Soe and Saw Hsa Baw Naw, spoke to Inside News about their recent trip.

Saw Min Moe says the trip was more difficult than expected because of the number of Burmese soldiers in the area.

“Troops buried mines in villagers farmlands and on the roads --- people were too afraid to travel or work on their farms.”

Min Soe experienced what it is like for the villagers living under the rule of the military regime.

“Civilians are facing many difficulties. There is more fighting. Soldiers are closing access in and out of villages.”

Min Soe enjoyed meeting and talking with the villagers.

“I talked a lot with Ber Ray Htoo, 30 who says the main problem is security and earning a livelihood. They live in constant fear of Burma army soldiers and mines.”

On 7 March 2005, Saw Ber Ray Htoo stepped on a landmine in an area regarded as free of landmines.

“After they [soldiers] left I stepped on one of their mines.”

Saw Min Soe’s says many villages will face problems from landmines now and in the future.

“How can people farm their land or raise their children with so many mines there. The villages that are in real danger and closest to the mine areas are Hsaw Wah Der, Sho Hser, He Daw Hgaw and Wah Soe villages.”

Saw Min Soe says the future looks bleak for them.

“Last year the Burmese army occupied this area. They took forced labour, restricts their movement, stopped people trading or doing business. They closed down all trade, threatening anyone who broke the restrictions with three-year jail sentences.”

Villagers earn their living from growing and selling betel nut, betel leave, durian, mangos and cardamom.

“Because of travel restrictions many villagers have left their plantations and moved to jungle hideouts Others who couldn’t survive made the long trek to Ei Tu Hta (IDP) camp on the Thai Burma border.”

As many as 3000 people trekked to Ei Tu Hta and another 23,000 live in makeshift camps deep inside Karen State.

“To live under the constant threat of landmines, jail sentences, travel restrictions, forced labour and unable to grow enough food to feed their families will force many more to the border. The future doesn’t look good.”

Saw Hsa Baw Naw’s MRE team had first-hand experienced of how Karen villagers live under Burmese



**Mines!
Danger!**

military rule. He spoke to Inside News.

Hsa Baw Naw team went inside to teach villagers about the risk of landmines. "Our job was to teach those who knew nothing about the risks and to train those who did, to pass on their knowledge to others. We also wanted to warn parents and teachers to tell their children and students to be careful."

For many villagers this has been the first time they have received landmine training. Hsa Baw Naw says.

“There have been a lot of people wounded and killed by landmines.”

Hsa Baw Naw is proud that he can help his people.

“After we gave training people are more aware about the risk from mines.”

Hsa Baw Naw and his team work under dangerous circumstances.

“At Belin Township, Burmese army and DKBA militia soldiers attacked us. I feel sad because what we do saves lives.”

Hsa Baw Naw team was afraid of being arrested, tortured and interrogated.

village life

“They will confiscate our GPS and compasses which we need to effectively map and survey the landmine areas.”

Hsa Baw Naw and his team encountered Burma army soldiers at every turn and twist of their trip.

“When we arrived at Ta U Nee village to do the training, SPDC troops also arrived at the village. We fled and hid in the jungle. The SPDC soldiers made camp at the village and we could not conduct the training or document landmine incidents.” Hsa Baw Naw says it was the same story at Ler Poe village.

“Before we arrived, one of the villagers told us SPDC troops were stationed at the village. Again we hid in the jungle, this time we had to sleep there for three nights.”

The team spoke to a woman about her landmine accident. “She said she has only one sister and no parents and was unable to go out and find work. She needs an artificial leg and medicine.”

It was a story Hsa Baw Naw was to hear from other villagers.

“Many die and the injured need their wounds cared for and they need medicine.”

The team worried villagers might misunderstand their intentions.

“We always told people who we were in order for them to trust and to to understand us. MRE is badly needed

here. Many villagers will die or be horribly injured if they don’t understand the risks.”

Hsa Baw Naw says after soldiers have been in the area risks increase.

“I tell them not to touch bullets or landmines that have not yet exploded. We show examples, prohibition signs and warn them not to touch landmines or strange objects.”

The high numbers of landmine victims in Karen State worries Hsa Baw Naw and his team.

“When I see people injured by landmines, I feel very sad because they are not soldiers, or deserve this.”

Hsa Baw Naw blames state terrorism by the Burmese dictators.

They use landmines so people cannot work and they cannot go to their plantations. Each year face they increasing hardships.”

Hsa Baw Naw says local people were quick to grasp MRE and it was encouraging to see people refusing to give in to state terror tactics.

“Local people are writing signs to warn others about landmines, dangers of using unused paths, going back to old villages and other areas where there might be landmines.”

Hsa Baw Naw says the international community should know and do something about the oppression and persecution of Karen villagers by the Burmese military.



**Beware,
soldiers mine farms**



Beaten, starved and forced through mine fields

Min Naing, 35, lives in Toungoo Town, Bego Division. He struggles to make a living and take care of his mother by working at a local teashop. Min Naing has one leg. He remembers the time he his other leg was blown off by a landmine.

He says he even remembers the time.

“It happened at 11:30 on 15 November, 1999.”

Min Naing says he was taken from his house in Taungoo by the army to work as a forced porter.

“The soldiers who captured me were from Light Infantry Brigade 385 under Military Operation Command 3. Even though they forced me to carry heavy loads they didn’t give me enough food to live on. Sometimes, we carried heavy loads for the whole day without food. We were so hungry we ate banana trunk.”

Min Naing says the soldiers were brutal towards the porters.

“Porter who couldn’t carry their loads or keep walking were shot dead. I saw many porters sick from malaria, unable to climb up mountains with their heavy loads, fall to the ground. Soldiers kicked, tortured and later killed them. I was very upset at the

soldiers’ brutal treatment, but I dared not speak out because I was also afraid of being shot.”

Min Naing says he stepped on a mine when he was carrying army food supplies.

“I lost my left leg beneath the knee. One of my friends died at once and another two were injured. I survived, but I was blinded in the left eye. The mine also injured my throat and my belly.”

He was fortunate that the soldiers sent him to a hospital in Rangoon.

“I was sent to a Military Hospital in Mingaladon, Rangoon and I was amputated above the knee. After one year, the hospital gave me a prosthesis.”

Min Naing complained the hospital officials were greedy and discriminated against civilians.

“When my prosthesis broke up from use, I went back to the hospital and showed them my accident certificate to ask for a new one. The officials told me, ‘we can’t give you a prosthesis they’re for soldiers only. If you want one, you have to pay’.

I went without a new prosthesis as I didn’t have money to pay.”

Min Naing came back to worked at a teashop to save money for a new prosthesis. He worked for more

than a month. He heard about Mae Tao Clinic in Thailand from a friend.

“On the way to the Clinic I stayed at a monastery in Malmyaing. One of the monks guided me to Dr.Cythia’s Clinic in Mae Sot where he said I could get a new prosthesis. I had no money so the monk gave me 5,000 Kyat for my traveling costs to get to Mae Sot.”

Min Naing says he was treated for free at Dr Cynthia’s Clinic.

It was different at the military hospital. The Clinic showed me respect. Now, I got my new leg and I am very happy.”

Min Naing says the health service in Burma can’t compare to the treatment he received from Dr Cynthia’s border clinic.

“In Burma they only care about money. They discriminate against poor people, it hurt my heart.”

Landmines — a chronic emergency

Landmines are used to destroy equipment and to kill or mangle people. Landmines cause death and serious injuries, as many as 20,000 new casualties are reported each year. Most are civilians. Burma is one of the worst offenders, with up to 1500 killed or injured each year. According to a report by the Back pack Health Workers Team (BPHWT) “Chronic Emergency” these figures are “believed to be an significant under estimation.”

The report says the Burmese army soldiers mine village paths and roads, around its military camps, abandoned villages, rice storage barns, crop fields in an effort to depopulate areas.

Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) also uses mines, but according to the report the “KNLA manufactures simple mines out of explosives, pellets, and AA batteries wrapped in plastic and encased in bamboo or plastic piping.” The BPHWT says in their report that the KNLA warn villagers of mine placement, but villagers are still at risk from them. Burmese army soldiers never warn villagers about mines or remove them.

The report found that villagers not wounded by mines are “profoundly affected as fear of mines often limits foraging or travel, with significant impact on economic security and access to services, including healthcare.”





Mines are deadly!

Aw Ku Ku and Saw Ah Leh when in the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) used to defuse landmines. They say they saw it as their duty to make areas safe for Karen villagers. Both men now live in Ei Tu Hta camp for internally displaced people. The camp sits on the Salween River on the Burmese side of the Thai Burma border.

Both men arrived there after the massive military offensive against villagers in northern Karen State in 2006. Aw Ku Ku and Saw Ah Leh say they are the victims of Burmese military landmines. Since their accidents both men find it is a constant struggle to feed their families.

Aw Ku Ku and his wife Naw Lay Ley Paw fled their Htee Thee Pu village with their two children and arrived in Ei Tu Hta camp in April, 2006.

Aw Ku Ku says he stepped on landmine when he was trying to dismantle Burmese army mines planted on the road to Htee Thay Pu village.

"I did this not because I was my willing, but it was my duty. SPDC troops planted landmines beside the road which

villagers used daily. Villagers couldn't go out to work and we tried to clear the mines."

Aw Ku Ku and his friends de-mined four or five SPDC landmines before he was blown up.

"I was unconscious after the blast and I woke up in the village clinic. The place of the incident and the village is not very far apart. The villagers rushed to me and quickly sent me to our battalion headquarter clinic. This saved me."

Aw Ku Ku described the type of landmine.

"I was blown up by a plastic mine. By the time I regained my consciousness, both of my eyes couldn't see a thing. I realized I was blind. I am still suffering from the affects of the mine. I easily get fever, pains in my arms, legs or my eyes."

"After I was blown up I quit being a soldier and now live my life as an ordinary civilian with my family in Ei Tu Hta camp. I would love to regain my sight in the future."

Saw Ah Leh, 32, and his wife Naw Ywa Blu (25) have a daughter who was born blind. They are originally from Pyay Kyan Ye village in Taw Oo district. *Continued page 17...*

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Saw Ah Leh says.

"I came here because there are more and more [Burmese] troops coming into our area. They blocked the road that went to the farms or our cultivation areas stopping villagers from travelling. The soldiers shot villagers who tried to farm their land."

Saw Ah Leh says he stepped on a mine when he was trying to de-mine Burmese army landmines planted on a road used by villagers.

"The troop cut-off all the roads to their farmlands by planting mines. During my time as a soldier, I de-mined SPDC landmines four times. The first time, I de-mined eight landmines, second time six landmines, third time four and the last time five landmines — I stepped on the fifth mine, it was a M14 type."

Saw Ah Leh's leg was amputated and because of his KNU involvement, government troops were looking for him.

"I had to hide in the jungle with my family, until I could go to Ei Tu Hta camp. I'm very happy here because we don't have to worry too much about attacks from the soldiers or worry about our food. For the moment we live well and eat well here."

"Landmines come in different shapes and sizes..."

Landmines are never safe

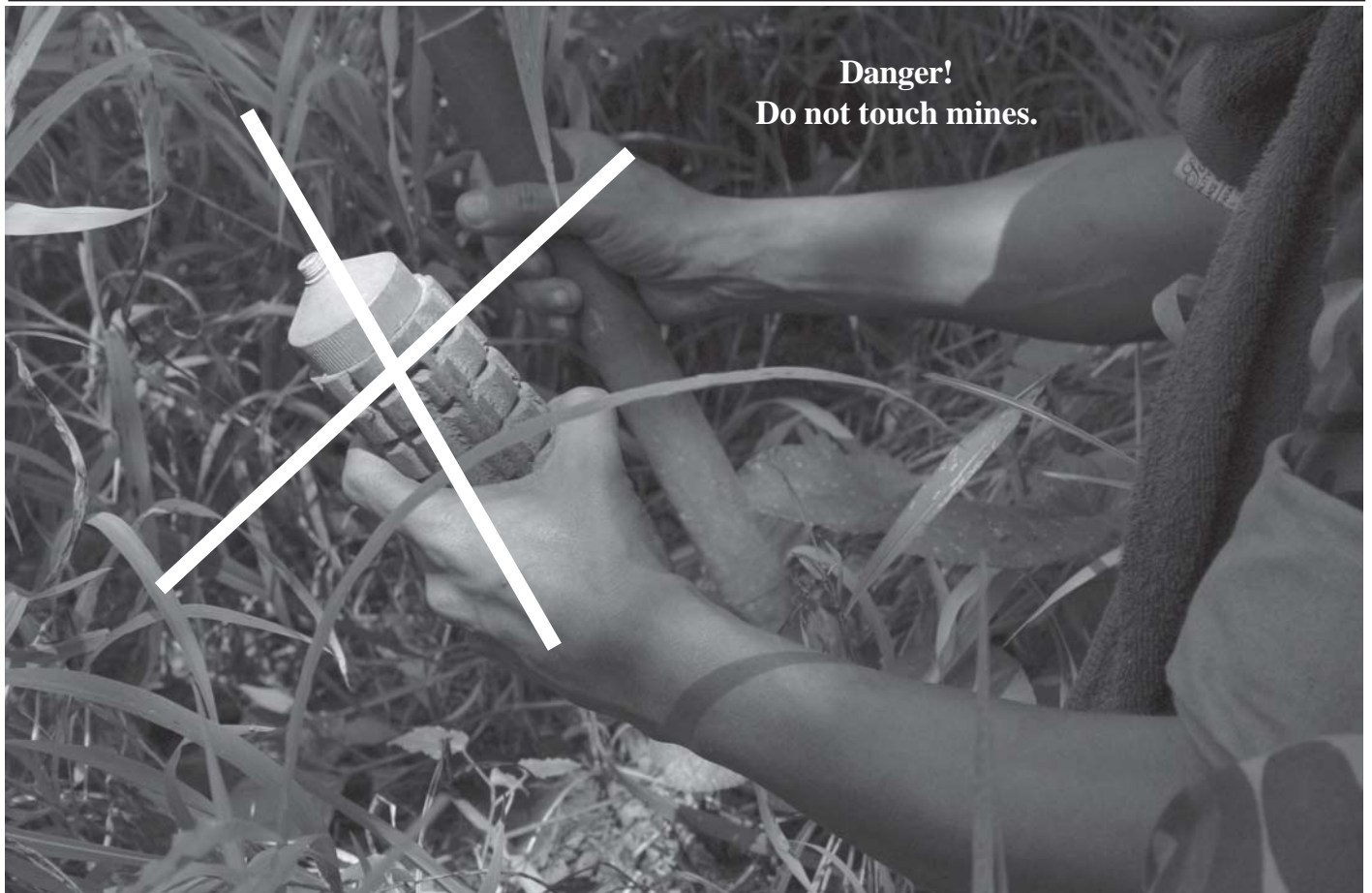
Landmines are weapons designed to kill and maim. They come in different shapes and sizes and are built from different materials. Some are made from metal, plastic and bamboo - pvc water pipe, glass bottles, tin cans and plastic drink containers are also used.

Mines are difficult to see, they are hidden under ground, under grass, in trees, under water or covered with leaves and sticks.

Mines don't come alone. Do not touch any mine. Tripwires are used to trigger mines. According to the Kawthoolei Department of Health and Welfare MRE Centre if a trip wire is spotted people should "not step over or pull or cut or touch a trip wire because it is very dangerous and there may be an underground mine buried on the other side." They warn where there is one mine there are usually more mines.

Travelling in an unknown area is dangerous. Ask local people for a safe path. Stay on well used roads. Don't leave the path even to go to the toilet. Many mines are laid at the side of safe paths do not wander off. Don't go to wrecked vehicles as it may be booby-trapped. Don't hunt animals in areas you don't know. Keep children close to you when walking on safe paths. Don't let them wander off into unknown areas to play. Remember landmines are never safe even when wars are over.





Villagers used to clear mines

According to reports from the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) the Burmese army continues to terrorise Toungoo District. Burning villages, building new army camps and forcing villagers to clear landmines and act as human shields on the Toungoo- Mawchi road. Villagers from 12 villages surrounding Baw Ga Lyi Gyi have been forced to be human shields around a bulldozer and to go ahead of the construction unit to clear the roadway of landmines. The village of Ber Ka Lay Ko was attacked and burned by Infantry Brigade (IB)11 and IB 14 late 2006. On 16 November IB 11 and IB 14 then burned Thay Gi La village. On the same day these two units burnt Htee Hsa Ber village. Over 6,000 people were displaced in Toungoo District.

Deadly mine kills four Karen

After forcing Baw Kwey Day (Ti Ko) villagers from their homes the Burmese army landmined the area. In one incident a fireplace was mined with the triggering device pressure plate buried in the ground close to the fireplace. A group of Karen soldiers (KNU) who were giving security to displaced people in the area triggered the landmine, killed three, injuring eight, four of them seriously.

Free Burma Rangers say the landmine was not the type normally used by the Burmese army. "The hole dug for the mine was over one and one half meters deep and 15 centimeters wide."

FBR say the hole for the mine was dug by either an auger or post-hole digger and that the mine was triggered by a blasting cap and what seems to be a piece of detonation cord that was placed on a tree stump and ran down to the mine.

"When the Karen men gathered around the fire they stepped on a pressure plate that fired the blasting cap and ignited the detonation cord that set off the mine. There was a delay of three seconds from the time the men heard the ignition and the explosion. It is possible that the mine also bounced up one meter before it exploded or this was an anti-vehicle shape-charge that directed the explosion straight up." FBR reported that one man suffered massive head trauma and died instantly, one man lost both legs and died instantly and one man died while being carried to a mobile clinic.

"The survivors are being treated and when stabilized, will be evacuated for more extensive medical care."

Clear Path offers help

Every year in Burma people are killed by landmines. In 2005 Landmine Monitor Report identified from collected data that 205 people had their lives shattered by mines. This figure was up from the 132 casualties reported in 2004. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) runs a War Wounded program to assist people injured by conflicts and it also helps those injured by landmines. In Burma there is limited health options available for landmine casualties. Help is available in hospitals and clinics on the borders of neighbouring countries. One such group offering help is Clear Path International (CPI) (www.cpi.org), a non-profit organization serving landmine accident survivors, their families and communities. CPI has been active on several projects along the Thai-Burma border since 2002.

Lobke Dijkstra, a physical therapist and country coordinator for Clear Path International outlines what her organisation does.

CPI supports the prosthetics workshop in the Mae Tao Clinic in Mae Sot, which also serves as a training and

distribution center. We offer a yearly training to people from several ethnic groups in order to become a prosthetics technician in their home-area.

Since 2005, the Mae Tao Clinic is equipped with a recently invented prosthetics technique, which makes it possible to produce artificial legs without the necessity for the patient to come to the workshop. It saves the amputee the risk and effort of a long journey. In Mae La refugee camp, CPI supports a 24-hour-care nursing home for 16 landmine survivors, run by the Karen Handicap Welfare Association (KHWA). We recently started working together with CIDKP to meet the needs of the landmine accident survivors amongst the internally displaced people, who have little access to the health care providers on both sides of the border. As to reduce the difficulty of reaching health care facilities, we try to position the prosthetics workshops and rehabilitation facilities as close as possible to the IDP-camps. CPI stresses the importance of extensive treatment and care after landmine injuries. Clear Path tries to meet the victim's and their family's needs by assessing the individual case and providing support as much as possible.



Landmines — everyone suffers

Ba Sein his wife Ma Htun and their three children were hammered by the Burmese military. Soldiers targeted Ba Sein for unpaid porter work.

‘If I couldn’t go with them they fined me 1000kyat a month. When I couldn’t pay I ran away, but they caught me. They took me for 10 days work. We had to carry shells, military equipment. The soldiers gave us one cup of rice a day. After about four days I was following behind the lead porter. The two in front took the full blast killing them. I lost sight in my left eye.’

Ba Sein wears thick-framed black sunglasses.

‘I lost my left eye in 1986. In 1997, the soldiers took me to build their fort. We cut timber and cleared the land. I was weak from sickness, but still had to work. The load was too heavy but they made me carry it. I fell down and was impaled on spikes used to protect the fort. The load held me down and my good eye was punctured. We had no money for medical treatment. My eye healed but I was blind.’

With her husband unable to work the responsibility of feeding the family fell on Ma Htun.

‘Soldiers use mines to stop us planting and harvesting our

rice. Two mines had exploded in two days, but I decided to gather leaves in the forest. I walked off the path. The mine blew apart my leg. I fainted and my friend tied my sarong to slow the bleeding. I was lucky. It only took two hours to get to a hospital. Now we are both injured it is difficult to work.’

The family has to keep working to feed and care for each other.

‘Before I lost my leg I could get work pounding rice, now my husband does it with our guidance. I weave clothes and my eldest son tends cattle. It will take all day to tell you my troubles they’re endless. We wanted our children to grow up and live some life without hardship. For us they’re our hope. I don’t want my son to work. I want him to go to school.’

Car Htoo Heh is only eight years old and his young face shows he takes his responsibilities seriously.

‘I’m happy I can help my Ma and Pa. When water is scarce in the camp I find some in the hills and sell it to help Ma.’ Ma Htun nods as her son talks.

‘He’s a good boy, he takes nothing. We depend on him, I need him.’