

# Inside News

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



*Saw Ba Oo Gyi, father  
of Karen resistance*

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# No trust in regime's vote

Burma's military dictators held a national referendum vote on May 10<sup>th</sup> to get their constitution endorsed. According to the regime, 92 percent of people voted for the constitution. Nobody believes this result. As usual the regime kept the Burmese people in the dark, only releasing the constitution to the public five weeks before the vote.

The constitution was 14 years in the drafting. It's hard to see why. It excludes the rights of ethnic nationalities and gives the military huge amounts of power to continue their unconstitutional grip on Burma.

Political activists showed their opposition to voting 'Yes' by organizing peaceful demonstrations wearing 'No' T-shirts and handing out leaflets. Even this small gesture of defiance was met by violence by the regime and its institutional thugs. People were beaten and jailed.

Most Burmese and ethnic nationalities didn't know anything about the regime's referendum. This is not surprising as opposition parties, journalists and activists can be jailed for 'disrupting the constitution or referendum' i.e. informing the public.

As the military dictators try to convince the international community they are moving towards a 'democracy' it is worth remembering this is the same regime that brutally shot, beat and jailed monks and peaceful demonstrators last September.

It is also the same military government who ordered the destruction of Karen villages and forced dislocation of 70,000 Karen people from their homes in 2007.

This constitution is a sham. The military government has silenced the media by jailing journalists under the recently introduced referendum law. By writing critical stories they can be jailed for three years and fined 100,000 kyat. The most passive of demonstrators can be imprisoned for up to twenty years. Now the regime hopes to bully the Burmese people into believing they overwhelmingly voted for their fraudulent constitution. Burma will only have real political change when all political prisoners are released, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and the ethnic nationalities of Burma are included in the process. By refusing this the regime is demonstrating it is not sincere about change and the referendum vote was just more of the same. This is a regime that has shown time and time again it cannot be trusted, and that's why their constitution should be rejected.

## MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

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



## Burma's vote to nowhere

On May 10<sup>th</sup> the Burmese people either rejected or endorsed the military government's draft constitution. Most Burmese people have not yet seen it. It was only released to the public five weeks before the vote. In rural and ethnic states people are still waiting to see the constitution in their own languages. So far the regime has only released it in limited number in Burmese and English. More than 40 percent of Burma is made up of ethnic nationalities. School teacher, Naw Wah from the Irrawaddy Delta told Inside News that people in her village will be forced to support the referendum.

"It will be like attending a mass rally. There's no choice, when they call we have to go. Everyone over 18 will have to vote. We don't understand the vote, we don't know if it will be a ballot box."

Naw Wah says people don't have information about the constitution or what she will be voting for.

"We have no confidence in government radio or newspapers, we don't believe what they say."

Opposition parties or activists in Burma can be jailed for three years for being critical of the referendum. Naw Wah says most people in her district fear authorities.

"The Ya Ya Ka came to our village to take the names of people in our households. If we don't give to the

village headman they will make him suffer."

Saw Ber Htee Po from Toungoo District in Karen State, agrees with Naw Wah.

"If the village headman doesn't give the household list, the authorities will restrict the movements of the headman and villagers. They will block our roads, restrict us using farm machinery to one day a week. It will be hard they will make the villagers pay."

Saw Ber Htee Po says he has not seen any information on the referendum vote.

"No leaflets, no copy of the constitution, no education, we don't even know how to vote."

Saw Ber Htee Po says if villagers want to talk about the constitution they have to do it in secret.

"The soldiers will cause us problems. In the village it is different than the city. If we speak openly we can be killed."

Saw Ber Htee Po says the Karen people are not represented by military government's constitution.

"The KNU has not participated. It's not for us. Everyday in Karen State it is bad. The Burmese army is fighting a war against us. If they find a foreign newspaper or even a copy of *Inside News* we'd be sent directly to jail. What sort of government does that?"

# No freedom, no pay...



*Villagers forced to collect bamboo for SPDC soldiers*

*Photo:KHRG*

Saw Lah K'Paw asks why should he and other villagers have to work for free for the Burmese army.

“They rule us by guns. They think we should work for them and not work for ourselves. They forbid students to learn our own language and we can't give our children Karen names. These soldiers want to steal our culture from us and make us lose our Karen identity.”

Saw Lah K'Paw, 38, unable to work his own crops decided to leave his village.

“I used to live in Ler Doh Township, K'Naw Mei village with my family. Now I have come to Mae La refugee camp.”

According to Saw Lah K' Paw his is an ordinary family.

“We don't have any properties but we worry for our children so much. I was forced to work for the Burmese army and had to give everything we owned to them. They don't understand our problems, they just want us to carry out their orders.”

Saw Lah K'Paw says if he can't work for the

soldiers he has to pay money for someone else to replace him.

“Before I came here, I portered for them for a month and they beat me. They hit me and if we resists their order... they kill us as they want. I have seen this many times. They don't give us food, drink and don't let us to take rest.”

Saw Lah K 'Paw had to carry supplies through landmined areas.

“They ordered villagers to go in front of them and if something happens it will be the villagers who get hurt.”

Saw Lah K' Paw says the soldiers built a school but they rule it with a ironfist.

“All the teacher are Burmese and we are not allow to learn our Karen language. Parents have to pay for the school materials.”

The Burmese armies ban people from going outside thier villages.

“They punish us in different ways. If we have cows, or a ploughing machine we have to pay them a tax every month. We have to bring them

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# Getting to safety

Saw Du Kaw, 26, from Kho Saw Der village is a single man and does what he can to help his people. Soldiers forced him to leave his village for a camp on the Salween River on the Burmese border.

“I left with four families. In our village we could not grow enough food or a good rice crop. The activities of Burmese army soldiers in our village meant we could not farm.”

Saw Du Kaw says a car road built last year gave soldiers access to the villages. “Several villages were forced to relocate to our village. This meant we had more people and not enough land for villagers to work on.

Saw Du Kaw came to Ei Tu Hta camp with 25 other people.

“We left Kho Saw Der on 23 of April and we reached Ei Tu Hta three days later. All my family members came up with me.”

Saw Du Kaw saw many villagers have their crops destroyed by the troops.

“Many people are now faced with difficulties and think about coming to the refugee camp.”

Saw Du Kaw’s mother has been sick for six years and with little health care available in Burma he took her to the camp’s clinic.

“To get to a hospital from our village is very hard. We would have to pay a lot of money for poor services. We had no money to buy medicine for her. The Clinic in the camp is better than we had in Burma.”

Saw Du Kaw says there are many places to farm near his village, but they are too close to the Burmese army camps.

“We dared not to work on this land. We now have to grow rice in an area where the soil is no good. Many people are hunger.”

Saw Du Kaw says on the way to the camp his party was harassed by Burmese army soldiers.

“We were questioned by the SPDC troops. We had to cover the children with blankets. We’ve just arrived in Ei Tu Hta and will build a house. Meanwhile we stay in the store, cook outside and wash in the river. We don’t even have enough plates to eat our food off.”



# Life is hard



Pregnant Naw Ler Paw, 29, has to bring up her son, 9, and daughter, 7 on her own. Her husband died last year from sickness. She finds it hard to care for two young children with another on the way. Naw Ler Paw is originally from Pur Pu village, near Pa Saung. Naw Ler Paw fled from the Burmese army, forced labor and oppression to come to a refugee camp on the Thai Burma border.

“When I was in my village, soldier scared me. I always had to to work for them and I didn’t have time to work for my family. So I escaped to this camp.”

As a pregnant woman, she has difficulty earning a living for her family. Her husband is dead, her children are young and she is pregnant.

After her husband died, Naw Ler Paw lived with her parent-in-laws and work on their farm in Pur Pu village. She couldn’t work well because of her pregnancy. Life was hard. Her two children needed to go to school, but she couldn’t afford it. “It was not easy to find money. The price of food and school fees are

high. I have had some difficulties with my pregnancy. Because of all these problems, I came to the camp for a better future.”

Naw Ler Paw didn’t have any money to pay for the boat fee but the driver let her go for free. Their journey took about two weeks to reach Ei Tu Hta camp on the Burmese side of the Salween River. When she arrived at the camp she didn’t have a house, so she stayed with her relatives in then camp.

Naw Ler Paw says that she always tries to face her difficulties with courage. The Karen Women Organization helps her with some household items and food.

Naw Ler Paw says.

“When I lived in my village, prices of goods were high and so were school fees. Sometimes, I couldn’t afford to buy rice. It’s a lot better here for us. I don’t need to pay for my children school fees and I don’t need to buy rice. When I have difficulty, there are people who will help me. I am very happy.”

# Life on the run

In times of peace, Karen villagers have no trouble growing food and looking after their families. In 2007, the Burmese army increased their operations against villagers. The soldiers burnt them from their homes. Many villagers had to take refuge in hideouts. Others stayed on their farms, but were unable to work under the rule of the military. Many villagers prevented from farming, had difficulty finding enough food to feed their families. Naw Wah, a mother of nine, from Kay Pu village, says life under the soldiers is tough.

“I can’t feed all my children, so we have to live in different places. We grow some rice, but not enough for our family. I had to send two of my children to a refugee camp in Thailand.”

Naw Wah describes the impact the soldiers have made on her and her family’s life. “In our village soldiers are only 10 minutes away, nobody dares to work their farm. We had to leave for the jungle and now we have uncertain shelter. We stay between Htee Pu Lo and Ta Thoo village, there are only six or seven household in this little camp. There are many people from other villages around us, we don't have enough space to grow crops”.

Naw Wah talks about the night the soldiers attacked her village.

“The Burmese army entered our village so we left our at night on April 7, 2007. The night we left our village, I heard a big shell come over me. One of my sons pulled me down to safety. I was very scared. To save our lives we ran. We tried to take rice and pots with us, but it was difficult because of the darkness. Many people ran to different places. Some villagers escaped across the border to a Thai refugee camp.”

Naw Wah says life on the run is hard. They live in fear, never sure when the army will attack.

“The Burmese soldiers shoot mortar shells all the time. We don’t know where they will fire. They shoot to the place where they think people are hiding. We are afraid to go out from our new camp.”

The armies operations against villagers has made life impossible, we can't even grow food says Naw Wah.

“Last year we did not have our own rice crop. We just worked with other people in their fields and fed ourselves from day to day. We helped other people at harvest and they gave us one tin of paddy each day we worked. I help my friends collect their chili and they shared half of it with me.”

Naw Wah misses her children.

“I want to visit my children in the refugee camp but I heard the SPDC troops based on the borderline are being exchanged and it has made traveling dangerous. I will try but if I can’t get through I will return to the place where I live and try later, but I miss my kids.”





## It's not home, but it's safer

Burma's military government is acknowledged as having turned one of South East Asia's richest countries into one of the world's poorest nations.

It spends more on its military than it does on health, education or social programs that benefit citizens.

The regime would rather abuse Burmese people. These abuses can be witnessed in any town or village; all roads, bridges and army camps are built using forced labor. Many people are forced from their homes into mountain or jungle hideouts to avoid being taken as forced laborers, having money and goods extorted and being forced to relocate. Naw Hlar Gay, 25, lived in Dae Gaw village in Mu Traw district, until she was forced to leave. "Now I live in this camp on the river. We don't farm but it's safer than our village. We left because we had no food and heard in this coming dry season the SPDC troops will attack every Karen village. I was scared to stay, I'm so afraid of them.

Naw Hlar Gay is frightened the soldiers will kill her and her family.

"I'm afraid they will shoot us when they come. It's no better for people who live in ceasefire-areas, they are not free to do their jobs, they are always forced to do work for the soldiers." Naw Hla Gay explained why people left their village.

"Many people moved to other places, some of them came to the refugee camp, very few stayed back in the village. Four families traveled here with me."

Naw Hla Gay says she is not afraid of the hard traveling but is afraid of the soldiers.

"In the past, I came and studied in Mae Ra Mo refugee camp. When I got married, I went back to live with my mother-in-law in my village. But the situation worsened and we had problems getting food. I'm so afraid the SPDC troops would come to our village, I escaped to Ei Tu Hta. It's not home but at least I feel safe."

# No time to work for the family

Farmer, Saw Taw Pwe, says he doesn't have enough time to work or harvest enough food for his family because he is forced to work for the Burmese army.

"I have four in my family; me, my wife, my son and daughter. I try to live a peaceful life. But in 2006, SPDC soldiers from Division 37 forced villagers to carry their loads. It was time for us to plant our crops or clean the land we and couldn't do it. We had to work for the SPDC soldiers."

Saw Taw Pwer, 29, from Nwa Lay Kho village in Mone Township, Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District says villagers were used as forced labor and their movement was restricted.

"Burmese soldiers from battalion 37, were ordered by Brigadier General Tun Lin Oo that every villager could only farm between 7 am and 4 pm. If villagers were seen out after those times they were accused of having connections to the Karen National Union (KNU) and were punished by soldiers."

Saw Taw Pwer explained the restriction meant villagers couldn't farm or harvest enough for their families.

"When we couldn't spend the night at our farms, wild animals destroyed our rice paddy. If we have a food shortage, many other problems will follow."

Saw Taw Pwe said because villagers have to work for the soldiers, many villagers left the village.

"I left my home and hid in the jungle with my family. On the way, we met other villagers who had fled and were hiding in the jungle while trying to get to safety."

Saw Taw Pwe says the villagers decided to travel together to the border. We were now 250 people."

Saw Taw Pwe says people suffered from malaria and many were sick on the way.

"People suffered, especially children with malaria and diarrhea. We had no medicine to give them. Two children died. We tried to treat them with herbs. We arrived at Ei Tu Hta camp on 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2007." Saw Taw Pwe said most of his troubles disappeared when he arrived.

"When we arrived here, we were given food, medicine and our children can go back to school. Our sorrow has almost gone. Although we don't have money, most of our worries are gone."



# Karen Leader -



*Pado Mahn Sha, 65, leader of the Karen National Union, Burma's largest armed opposition group, was assassinated in his Mae Sot home on Valentine's Day. In a recent interview with journalist **Phil Thornton\***, he discussed plots to kill him and his hopes for the Karen.*

Pado Mahn Sha sat outside his house - possible enjoying the late afternoon sunset - following a briefing session with a foreign analyst. The kitchen noise added to the normality of his day as staff prepared his evening meal. A blue pick-up stopped outside. Two men left the truck, entered the house, greeted Mahn Sha and shot him dead. One of the men fired once, the other twice. The men fled the house, chased by one of Mahn Sha's staff, the gunmen fired at him as they drove off. The assassins stolen truck was later found about 40 kilometers north of Mae Sot, close to a river crossing controlled by a militia group armed by the Burmese regime.

Following Mahn Sha's assassination, the town gossip went into overdrive calling it 'a revenge killing', 'in-fighting between opposing Karen factions', 'hired gunmen linked to joint Thai Burmese business projects such as highways and river dams'.

Mahn Sha acknowledged he was under constant pressure from business interests who wanted to exploit the Karen's natural resources.

But regional intelligence sources deny those allegations and say the truth is simpler. They say Mahn Sha's tough stance in ceasefire talks and his refusal to accept terms

offered by Burma's generals was the reason he was murdered.

Intelligence sources say they have electronic proof the Burmese regime's Office of Military Affairs Security (OMAS) and Lieutenant Colonel Myat Htun Oo were involved as well as Lieutenant Colonel Min Chit Oo from South Eastern Military Command.

"We know who is responsible for ordering the shooting, we know the links between the killers...we have *all* the names. It may have been a Karen gunman who was paid to pull the trigger, but Mahn Sha's murder and the KNU hit list was ordered by the regime."

Mahn Sha was the one Burmese opposition leader who had the ability and the respect to unite ethnic and Burman opposition groups and to build a formidable alliance. Mahn Sha was a constant thorn in the Burmese government's attempts to show the international community they were moving towards democracy. While Mahn Sha was alive the regime knew it could not achieve a ceasefire on their terms or dismantle the KNU. Many ethnic leaders who had signed ceasefire agreements with the regime had personally benefited with large houses, flash cars and timber, gems or drug concessions. But Mahn Sha couldn't be bought. He shunned the bright lights and lived a simple life. His house was small and he traveled in old, second hand cars. Many of these splits, factions or ceasefire groups are blamed entirely on the Burmese regime. But according to Desmond Ball, a professor in the Strategic

## - *was murdered*

and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University, it's too simple to say it's all engineered by the regime.

"Local dynamics play a huge part, whether it's religion, business interests, education or perceptions leaders are living well in towns while soldiers are doing the fighting on basic rations. These are all easy issues for the regime to flame and cause divisions."

Professor Ball says the ethnic groups have to bear responsibility for the breaks by factions and respond to the threat.

"It's more necessary now than ever for the ethnic armies to form an alliance. They're all down to minimum capacity. If they don't, they'll get knocked off one by one."

Mahn Sha words echoed Professor Ball's assessment.

"We have no uniting ideology, without it, how are we ethnic people of Burma going to compete against the regime? We do well in the battlefield but politically we don't, we have not yet learnt from our past mistakes, but we will."

Mahn Sha told me the regime's objective was to divide the Karen.

"These ceasefire groups and individuals who comply with the regime are a disgrace. General Bo Mya [late Karen legendary leader] said 'we want peace, but it must be based on justice and dignity, not a quick profit for a few'."

Professor Ball says Mahn Sha's demonstrated ability to unite the opposition and form alliances was of major concern to the regime.

The Burmese military dictatorship held a national referendum on its own Constitution as proof to the international community of its sincerity to have political change. The opposition alliance, in defiance, released in Bangkok, their 'draft Constitution of the Federal Republic of the Union of Burma'. Pado Mahn Sha is credited as the driving force behind it. And according to his ethnic colleagues this was why he was killed.

Dr Lian Sakhong, general-secretary of the Ethnic National Council (of Burma), told *The Diplomat*, that Mahn Sha's death is a massive set back to the Burmese opposition groups.

"Pado Mahn Sha was the leader of all ethnic nationalities in Burma, including Burmans. He united everybody. He was the bridge between the ethnic people and the Burmans. He worked hard to rebuild the union of Burma into a peaceful country and move the country to a democratic and open society. The military have sent a clear message to us by killing him — that they [regime] are not willing to engage in peaceful political dialogue."

During our interviews Mahn Sha insisted political dialogue was the only way Burma could resolve its conflict.

"We want to resolve our problems by peaceful means, but the Burmese [military] don't want that, they like the battlefield too much."

Mahn Sha, in spite of his desire for peaceful talks, was incensed by attacks on Karen villagers in 2007 that forced

as many as 76,000 people to relocate to jungle hideouts.

As an indication to the extent of the Burmese military campaign against the Karen, the humanitarian aid agency, the Thai Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) has reported that 3000 Karen villages had been destroyed between 1996 and 2006 — currently 500,000 people are displaced.

Mahn Sha was also angry that the Karen had to keep fighting against such a formidable armed enemy without international support.

"These people [villagers] are not soldiers. They're civilians. They [Burmese army] kill, burn, they torture our people and landmine our villages. We want peace, justice and we want to be part of a federation of Burma."

Mahn Sha said he was an internationalist. He was enthusiastic about plans to form an ethnic alliance with Burman opposition groups that could effectively combat the regime.

"The time of dictators is over, we live in the 21 century, it's time for the Burmese generals to make genuine peace with their people."

Always accommodating to the international community and media, Mahn Sha felt more could be done by the United Nations and its members.

"We need strong pressure from the international governments. Burma is an international problem. They're one of the biggest producers and traffickers of illicit drugs, recruiters of child soldiers, have one of the world's worst health records, poor disease controls, are an environmental disaster and traffic in people."

Mahn Sha spoke about the death threats and took seriously an intelligence report that the Burmese military dictatorship had plans to kill KNU leaders. He spoke of warnings of a hit list he had received from his own security officers. In the months leading up to his death there had been a number of grenades thrown at KNU leaders and a would-be Mahn Sha assassin confessing his intentions and his links to the regime.

Mahn Sha said he expected attempts on his life would be at night and had taken steps to never sleep in his own home. He insisted in spending his days at his home, mainly because he enjoyed the view across the paddy field from the seat on the porch.

Saw Hla Henry, a Karen leader said Mahn Sha would be missed.

"He was a strong man for the Karen people. He was smart and detested by the [Burmese] regime. Everything he was for the Karen, all Karen."

Mahn Sha scoffed at media stories and academic articles that had written off the Karen as a spent force.

"We will continue our struggle. Controlling land or territory is not important to us, but our people are. We save people first. It's not the first time critics have said the Karen are finished. When we lost Manerplaw [former KNU Headquarters] in 1995, our critics said we were beat, but the Karen are still fighting for Burma's freedom."

*\*The Diplomat Magazine*

# They treat us like slaves



Widower Naw Ther Yu Paw, 62, says people in her village of, Paw Pe Der, are afraid to go out to hunt or collect bamboo because Burmese soldiers landmined their forests. Naw Ther Yu Paw says soldiers run her village by the gun and fear.

“They swagger around aiming their guns at us and use villagers to work as they order.”

Naw Ther Yu Paw lives with her seven children in the village. Her husband died four years ago after he became ill working as a porter for the Burmese army.

Naw Ther Yu Paw is attending the closing ceremony at the Bible School in Mae La Refugee Camp and says.

“My son finished his schooling and in the next two years my daughter will too. If they live in our village they will not get a higher education and not be able to graduate like this.”

Naw Ther Yu Paw says life under the soldiers is hard, especially for young people who want an education.

“We have to stay and are not allowed outside

(as our right) without their [soldiers] permission. We have to live by their rules and under their orders. They make us to give them food. They order us to pay them money. We have to collect money from each household to give them.”

Naw Ther Yu Paw says the soldiers are like robbers.

“They order the head villager to give them people to carry supplies. They demand tax from every household. We can’t defy their orders. We give our time and work for them and have no time to work for ourselves.”

Naw Ther Yu Paw says it is common for the soldiers to take villagers and make them march in front of them.

“If the place is a landmine area or there is a risk of an attack from the Karen army, they order villagers to go in front of them – many villagers have been killed or injured like this. We have seen it many times.” Naw Ther Yu Paw says her family are poor people.

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“We don’t have much. But the soldiers take everything. They order us each month to give them money, each household has to pay them 1500kyat. We can’t defy them. If we do, they shout and beat us. They order us to give them bamboo, roofing leaves and force us to build their camps. We are afraid of them.”

Naw Ther Yu Paw says if the Burmese soldiers suspect someone of joining the Karen army the punishment for their families is harsh.

“They arrest their family and torture them. They stop family members from working.” Naw Ther Yu Paw says villagers who want to go out to the clinic or to buy food have to get travel documents.

“We pay for 100kyat for each document. If we don’t have the papers, we are not allowed to leave. Life is hell under the soldiers. They order and force us to work as their slaves. Each year their controls get stricter.”

### *No Freedom, no pay ...From page 4*

bamboo, roofing leaves and build their camp. We can't earn any income and can't grow any food if we have to work for them all the time.”

Saw Lah K'Paw says villagers have to pay for travel documents.

“If we go out we have to buy travel documents 500kyat. Another problem is our village head is a Burman. All money he taxes us he shares with the soldiers. I could not continue to live in the village so I took my family here.”

Saw Lah K'Paw says he will stay in Mae La until his children are educated.

“Here my children have rights. If there's no freedom in our country I will not go back, I will only go back when we have freedom.”





## A mother's

Naw Ma Thin Myet lived with her husband in Htee Pa Doh Hta village while he was in the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Her husband has been dead 7 years, but it hasn't stopped the Burmese army from intimidating her or her family.

When the Burmese army came to Naw Ma Thin Myet's village they'd ask her about her dead husband and if not satisfied with her answers they would hit her and threaten her.

Three years ago they arrested her youngest daughter's husband and he's not been released or heard from since.

Naw Ma Thin Myet thinks her son-in-law has already been killed by the soldiers.

"We're scared. We hear nothing. We don't know if he's dead or alive. I fled here with my daughter and grandson. We couldn't continue to live in our village so we came to the Thai border and now live here in Mae Ra Moe Refugee Camp."

Naw Ma Thin Myet, has three daughters and three sons. She says if she stayed in the village she and her family would always have problems with the Burmese authorities.

"They made me suffer. If the Burmese army saw me they'd ask me about my husband, where his weapons are hidden and to point out his friends. If I say I didn't know they'd hit me and choke me and say they kill me. She says the Burmese army often came to the village with ceasefire militia.

"They'd come with DKBA soldiers and ordered us to give them food. The Burmese army camp was close to us. It was easy for them to come and force villagers to carry supplies for them. They'd make us stay in the village and ordered us to not go outside for our work." Naw Ma Thin Myet says the soldiers were too lazy to do anything for themselves.

"They ordered villagers to give them free food. We'd have to work for them, if we didn't do

what they ordered they'd hit and fined us. They force us to be there guides, be messengers and work at their camp. They fenced us in as if we were animals."

Naw Ma Thin Myet says she got to the point where she could not take anymore abuse from the soldiers.

"We couldn't work land to feed ourselves, we bred chickens and bought paddy for our family."

Naw Ma Thin Myet says at the time of the arrest of her son-in-law her youngest daughter was two months pregnant.

"My daughters husband was taming buffalo in the forest when he was arrested by Burmese soldiers, he was ordered to work and carry their supplies. He didn't come home and I think he is dead."

Naw Ma Thin Myet says her family tried to find her son-in-law, but they didn't know where he was detained. Naw Ma Thin Myet

youngest daughter, Naw eh Paw, misses her husband and tells *Inside News* of her fears.

"My husband worked for our family and also was forced to work for the Burmese army. How many times they made him do this, I've lost count."

Naw Eh Paw says every time her husband was taken for forced labor she worried he might stand n a landmine.

"The Burmese army always orders villagers to go in front of their soldiers because if a landmine explodes villagers will get injured."

Naw Eh Paw says the soldiers always asked about her father.

"I don't want to suffer about this anymore if they try to find fault with us it is easy. We woory for our lives. So we fled to the refugee camp. I have already lost my husband, it is enough to suffer. Now I will look after and educate my son until he finishes. If there's no freedom in Burma I will not go back."

## courage



# Crimes against -

*Saw Lah Soe, a CIDKP Mine Risk Educator, has just returned from Karen State after an three month stay. He witnessed the Burmese Army attacking villages. He reports for Inside News.*

The Burmese army continues forcing Karen people from their villages.

Most of the people in this region earn their living from farming, growing vegetables and harvesting fruit. Villagers have to cope with natural disasters such as flooding and insect plaques destroying their crops. Saw Lah Soe says villagers can manage this, but it is the constant military attacks that make them vulnerable.

On October 2007, I went to Kler Lwee Htoo district to carry out a land mine survey. I saw many rice fields totally destroyed by insects. I talked to Saw Thay Pwe, a villager and farm owner who explained for me.

“The insects destroyed my rice field and seven other rice fields. The food problems facing us in 2008 will be much worse than in 2007.”

Villagers like Saw Thay Pwe live in fear of Burmese army patrols. Many rice fields, plantations and vegetable gardens have been destroyed by SPDC troops. Farmers barely

cope with food destruction caused by natural disasters. The army attacks have a devastating impact on villagers lives.

Saw Htee Moo Klo, a staff member of the Committee of Internally Displaced Karen People in Mone Township says.

“During 2007, the SPDC soldiers constantly attacked and sent patrols through the mountainous area of Mone Township. Many villagers had to abandon their fields and could not complete their harvest.”

Because of the patrols and attacks, villagers in the mountainous areas are always on the move. On December 2007, I reached to Yaw Khee village in Mone township and I saw villagers to live under trees.

Saw Maw Doh, one of the villagers in hiding told me.

“I have been in the jungle for over three months. I dare not go back. My house and the whole village was burnt down in September by Light Infantry Brigade, 536. The troops shot at the villagers and as they fled into the jungle, fired mortars after them.”

Saw Maw Doh continues his story and says the soldiers shelled the jungle in the hope of destroying the villagers hiding places.



Photo: FBR

## - *the people*

“We were afraid the mortars would hit us. Sometimes it came very close to our hiding sites. The soldier's camp is only three and a half hours walk apart. They launch mortars four to five times a month.”

He also talked about the risks of going back to the village to get their rice and food supplies. “I hid rice in our barn, I used to go back secretly at night to get it, now I dare not go back to my village anymore. In 2007, soldiers attacked my village five times.”

Saw Lah Soe witnessed villagers hurt or killed by grenade thrown by Burmese army soldiers. He says one of them died and the other was badly injured and was sent to Nwa Lay Kho clinic for treatment.

Saw Doo, who is the Hsaw Kha Der village tract leader from Klaw Khee village told Saw Lah Soe that on July 7<sup>th</sup> 2007, Light Infantry Brigade 338 arrested four villagers from Aung Soe Moe village and they used them for four days as porters, before killed them. On 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2007, Saw Kha Der village was burnt down and the villagers are now living in the jungle. Teachers and students finish their schooling among the trees.

On December 2007, I arrived to Mone township area and saw many displaced villagers.

The Burmese army regularly use villagers as forced labor. Extortion is also common.

Saw Ber Htoo, the CIDKP district coordinator from Ta Kae Pu village told me.

“In 2002, the Burmese army began building a road linking Tha Pyay Nyunt to Ma La Daw, to Ka Mu Loh to Play Khee and to Play Has Loh. Every year, the troops force villagers to work on this road that is for the army use and not for villagers.”

I met Maung Sein Han, a from Tha Pyay Nyunt a relocated village. He explained how roadwork is done in Burma. “In October, 2007, soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion 593



***Paddy destroyed by insects***

forced villagers to build the road. The soldiers have three steps. First; they force villagers to clear landmines, second; the troops forced villagers to dig up the road and third; they bring in their bulldozers to finish the road.”

Maung Sein Han continued his story

“Soldiers forced six villagers each day to be security guards on the road. I don't know when it will finish. Every three months, the troops are rotated and they take 100 to 200 villagers with them to carry their supplies. They use villagers as a human shield against landmines and Karen army attacks. Three villagers are forced to walk between two soldiers and more than 20 villagers have to walk in front. The use men, women, children and elders. Everybody has to do this, there are no exceptions. Villagers have no choice they are ordered.”

According to CIDKP secretary, Saw Hla Henry, some forced laborers have been killed or injured by landmines and says.

"This is an international crime and deliberately abuses civilians."

# Soldiers make me sick

In late 2007, Naw Oo Shwe, from Thay Ba Htee village decided she couldn't take anymore of Burmese army soldiers raiding her village.

"The soldiers located their base close to our village and stopped us from working. When we heard them coming, we ran. We feared they would shoot us."

Naw Oo Shwe said if soldiers stayed in the village, they could not go back until they left.

"We hid in the jungle until they left. Sometimes, it took up to a month before we could go home."

Naw Oo Shwe says it was worst when the soldiers arrived at the village without warning.

"If they see villagers running, they'd shoot at us. Sometimes people were killed and injured. We had no time to grab food."

Naw Oo Shwe, 56, earns a living from slash and burn farming. Her health is not good. Running from soldiers and having poor food supplies while hiding in the jungle has worsen her health.

"When we hide in jungle, we have to come back secretly to our hideout barn to get food. If the soldiers see us, they shoot at us. Sometimes we haven't got to our food, and we have to run." Naw Oo Shwe was sick during harvest time. "When my paddy is ready to be harvested, and I'm sick, I can't gather

it and it rots. I suffer always from headaches. I want to cure my sickness."

Naw Oo Shwe is angry with the Burmese soldiers and says.

"They shoot and fire mortars into our village. We have to dodge between the bullets. They chase and shoot at us. Some villagers, when they hear the sound of guns, their whole body shakes, some are in shock and become sick. If the Karen soldiers shoot at them, they shoot back day and night without stopping."

Naw Oo Shwe says Burmese soldiers steal and eat their livestock.

"Burmese soldiers spend nights in our village. They eat our pigs and chickens we leave behind. When we return, all our livestock are gone. We are angry, but we can do nothing. Just keep our feelings inside."

Naw Oo Shwe says she couldn't continue to live in the village. She moved with her her family to Ei Tu Hta IDP camp on the Burmese side of the Salween. She arrived there on 22 February 2008.

"I am happy here, I'm better off living here than in my village. I will stay here until the Burmese army stops attacking villagers. Until then I can't go back to my village."





# They can't stop me learning...



Saw Hser Gay, 14, wants to learn. But the Burmese army burnt and destroyed his school and village. His family took refuge in the jungle. Saw Hser Gay was determined to continue his studies. To do so he had no choice but to leave his parents and come to Ei Tu Hta Camp located on the Burmese side of the Salween River. He says it was hard to leave his family.

“I wanted to finish my high school and continue my study at leadership school. I will study about laws and human rights.”

Saw Hser Gay talks about his life before Ei Tu Hta.

Saw Hser Gay is from Mwee Loh village in Taw Oo (Taungoo) district. He told *Inside News* that last year, that SPDC soldiers operating in Taw Oo District, shot and killed villagers, burned down homes, killed livestock, destroyed food and crops.

“The Burmese soldiers if they see any villager, they don't keep them alive. They killed all.

They shot and killed animals. No one dared to stay in the village and we all scattered to hide in the hills and jungle.”

Saw Hser Gay was separated from his parents and it was a week before he saw them again.

“I ran and hid in the jungle, I didn't see my parents. I was scared. I didn't know what had happened to them. I was happy to meet them after a week hiding in the jungle.”

After Saw Hser Gay's school was burnt down, his parents told him to leave school and help them on the farm. But he wanted to continue his schooling and asked their permission to go and study.

“My parents told me to help them in their work because I don't have school anymore. But I told them that I am still young and I want to continue my study. I told them that I will go to a village that has a school and study there. I didn't want to stay here and be forced to work as a porter and carry Burmese soldiers' loads.”

Finally after much discussion, Saw Hser Gay parent's agreed to let him study. He left his home to go with his uncle and aunt to Ei Tu Hta camp and says.

“I am very happy. I can study. I have met some of my old friends and also made some new ones.”

Saw Hser Gay adventure for a better education is not over.

His aunt and uncle moved across the border to Mae Ra Mo refugee camp in Thailand. Left alone, Saw Hser Gay built a small hut and secured a monthly food ration from the camp leaders. Determined to finish his studies Saw Hser Gay says he knows where he's going with his life.

“When I get enough educations, I will work for my people. Because of the SPDC oppression on villagers and forcing my parents to live in jungle hideouts, I am going to work in politics. We have to stop the abuse of our people. I want to help our people.”

**This constitution is not for the people  
It secures power for the military regime**

