SHRF MONTHLY REPORT - SEPTEMBER 2008

by admin — last modified 2008-10-27 03:03

COMMENTARY

Various types of human rights violations committed by the Burmese military junta's troops are still rampant in Shan State and the perpetrators still enjoy the culture of impunity created under the policy of the junta to terrorize and subjugate local communities.

Incidents of extrajudicial killings by roaming SPDC troops in Shan State, especially in the rural areas, are still more or less frequent occurrences. The victims are often innocent villagers who have done no harm to anyone, including those who are being forced to serve the military as unpaid labourers, as reported in this newsletter's issue.

Rape is still common in many places as it is still used by the SPDC troops as an effective weapon of war to subdue the people.

Arbitrary arrest and detention, often on false accusations, are still handy tools for the SPDC troops to suppress the populations under their control.

Forcible recruitment to serve in the military and in military-sponsored quasi-civilian organizations, which are used in controlling the people, is practised by the SPDC and also its allied ceasefire groups.

Bullying is also one of the common characteristics of most of the Burmese military officers and troops who appear to enjoy terrifying the people.

Forced labour and extortion remain 2 of the most widespread abuses that take place virtually everywhere and all the time.

All these have deprived the people of their basic human rights and means of decent livelihood, and created a climate of fear from which many have fled and are still fleeing.

CIVILIAN PORTERS SHOT DEAD, ACCUSED OF BEING SHAN SOLDIERS AND IMPRISONED, IN LAI-KHA

In early 2008, 1 of 3 villagers who had been forced to serve as porters by SPDC troops from IB248 was shot dead by them and the other 2 were sent to prison in Lai-Kha town, in **Lai-Kha** township.

On the morning of 20 March 2008, a patrol of about 50 SPDC troops from Murng-Nai-based IB248 came and surrounded Nawng Phurk village in Haai Seng village tract, Lai-Kha township, and arrested 3 male villagers. The villagers arrested were:

1. Lung Aw, aged 48
2. Kan-Na, aged 37
3. Lung Su, aged 53

The villagers were forced to carry military things and go with the patrol, with their hands tied to the yokes that were used to carry things on their shoulders, until they reached Nam Wo village in Nawng Hee village tract, Nam-Zarng township, in

the evening where the SPDC troops stopped to rest during the night.

The 3 porters and some of the SPDC troops were put up in the downstairs of the village Buddhist monastery for the night. Early next morning, at around 4 o'clock, one of the porters, Lung Aw, was shot dead by the SPDC troops in the monastery.

The SPDC troops said they shot at Lung Aw because he tried to run away. A bullet pierced through his chest from behind and Lung Aw died instantly on the spot. The SPDC troops took the body away to be disposed of, but no one knew where it was.

The remaining 2 porters were taken back to Lai-Kha, accused of being members of the Shan resistance and handed over to the SPDC troops in Lai-Kha to be detained there. The 2 villagers were said to be still locked up in a military base in Lai-Kha when this report was received in mid 2008.

CIVILIAN PORTER BEATEN TO DEATH IN KAE-SEE

In late 2007, a civilian porter who was unable to continue to carry his load after serving as an unpaid porter for 10 straight days was beaten to death by SPDC troops from IB286, in Murng Naang village tract in **Kae-See** township.

Sometime in October 2007, a patrol of 20 SPDC troops from IB286 came to Wan Naa village in Murng Naang village tract, Kae-See township, and ordered the village headman to provide them with 2 civilian guides.

Accordingly, the village headman assigned 2 of his male Shan villagers to serve the military as had been demanded. The 2 villagers were:

1. Zaai Zaai, aged 38
2. Zaai Thun, aged 24

Though they were supposed to serve as guides, the 2 villagers were forced to also carry pots and pans and some backpacks as the military patrol searched the rural areas of Murng Naang village tract. After 10 days of hard labour, one of the porters, Zaai Zaai, was unable to continue for lack of strength and suffering from stomach pain.

Actually, Zaai Zaai was suffering from a hernia which was causing great pains in his lower stomach and he could not walk, and had to sit down and put down his load. However, because the 2 Shan porters did not speak Burmese well enough, they could not make the SPDC soldiers understand the situation.

The SPDC troops accused him of feigning to be ill and ordered Zaai Zaai to stand up. When he could not, one of the soldiers kicked him in the chest and he fell backward on the ground. After that, one soldier after another beat him with sticks as they ordered him to stand up.

As Zaai Zaai could not stand up, the SPDC troops continued to beat him until he died on the spot. His body was then thrown down a steep ravine named Huay Luk Lur about 15 miles southeast of Murng Naang village.

The SPDC troops continued patrolling for 2 more nights and released Zaai Thun, the remaining civilian porter, at his village, Wan Naa, on they way back to their base. The troops told the village headman that Zaai Zaai had died of illness while serving as guide, and bought a sack of rice for his family as consolation.

However, the village leaders were later able to learn the truth from Zaai Thun, who said he was threatened with death if he told someone to complain about it. The village leaders were also too scared of the SPDC troops to do anything about it.

GANG-RAPE IN KUN-HING

In May 2008, a woman who was returning home from her farm was gang raped by SPDC troops from IB246, in Nawng Saang village tract, **Kun-Hing** township.

Around noon on 24 May 2008, Naang Mawn (not her real name), aged 21, who had gone to work in a farm outside her village was returning home to get her day meal in Nam Mawn village, in Nawng Saang village tract, Kun-Hing township.

A short while after she left her farm, Naang Mawn ran into a patrol of about 13 SPDC troops from IB246 at a place a short distance from her village. The SPDC troops stopped her and asked several questions as to who she was and where she was going, etc..

After answering their questions the SPDC troops did not let Naang Mawn go, but took her to a remote spot not very far from her farm and gang-raped her. The troops let her go only after virtually all of them had raped her to their satisfaction.

Naang Mawn managed to get back to her village, which was not very far, that evening and recounted her plight to her parents. However, Naang Mawn parents were too afraid to do anything about it, except console their own daughter.

ARBITRARY ARREST AND DETENTION IN NAM-ZARNG

In April 2008, after a skirmish between SPDC troops from IB247 and Shan soldiers, 10 villagers of Wan Nawng village in Wan Nawng village tract, **Nam-Zarng** township, were accused of supporting Shan soldiers and arrested and put in jail in Nam-Zarng town up to the present.

On the early morning of 1 April 2008, a fierce gun battle broke out at Wan Nawng village between SPDC troops from IB247 who were staying in the village and a small group of Shan soldiers who had come from somewhere else.

The battle lasted for about 20 minutes after which the Shan soldiers retreated and disappeared into the forest. However, the SPDC troops suffered heavy casualties, including 7 dead and 4 wounded, and lost 6 combat rifles which the Shan soldiers had snatched away from the dead and wounded.

There were about 40 SPDC troops staying in the village at the time of the incident and their commander was among those killed in the battle. After the battle, during that day, they buried their dead and carried their wounded back to their IB247 base in the outskirts of Nam-Zarng town, without doing anything to the villagers.

On 2 April 2008, the next day, however, the SPDC troops came back to Wan Nawng village and ordered all the villagers to gather at a place. The troops accused the villagers of supporting the Shan soldiers and of bringing them to the village to shoot at the Burmese soldiers, and arrested 10 of them.

The 10 villagers, including the headman and his deputy, were tied up with ropes and taken away by the SPDC troops. It was learned that the villagers were being detained at a prison in Nam-Zarng town at least up to the time this report was received in mid 2008.

VILLAGERS TIED UP, THEIR COW STOLEN, IN KUN-HING

At the end of 2007, 2 villagers who were driving an ox-cart were seized, tied up to their cart and one of their draught oxen was stolen by a group of SPDC troops

from IB246 in the area of Ho Paang village tract in **Kun-Hing** township.

On 20 December 2008, Zin-Ta (m), aged 28, and his sister, Naang Khawng, aged 12, from Wan Hurng village in Ho Paang village tract, Kun-Hing township, drove an ox-cart carrying some sacks of peanut to an oil mill at Ho Paang village to produce oil for their own consumption.

When the villagers got to a place between their village and Naa Khawk village in the same village tract, they ran into a patrol of about 15 SPDC troops from IB246, led by Sgt. Thein Aung. The troops stopped them and asked if they knew anything about the movements of Shan soldiers in the area.

When they said they did not know anything about Shan soldiers, the SPDC troops tied them up to their cart and took away one of their draught oxen. After a short while, they heard 2 consecutive gun shots from some distance and the SPDC troops never returned, nor did their ox.

After about 2 hours, a fellow villager happened to come that way on a bicycle and untied the ropes that bound them to the ox-cart. The 2 villagers could not use their ox-cart because there was only one ox left and they took it back to their village.

The next morning, Lung Aa-Li-Ya, the father of the 2 villagers, after borrowing an ox from their neighbour and bringing back their ox-cart, went and reported the incident to the village headman and they all went to the village tract headman at Ho Paang village.

Together with the village tract headman, they went to the military base of IB246 and filed a complaint with the commander. But the commander said that there was no way his troops would do such thing to the people because they were well disciplined.

However, he did ask the villagers how much they had to pay for such a pair of oxen and the villagers said 280,000 kyat. The commander then said that he would give the villagers 5,000 kyat for their loss out of pity, not because his troops had stolen their ox, and asked them to be satisfied and not be so ready to accuse his troops in the future.

It was learned that when the SPDC troops returned to their base carrying a lot of beef with them, they reported that a cow was accidentally killed during a skirmish between them and a group of Shan soldiers, and they did not know whose bullets hit the cow. They later took the meat because it was a pity to just let it rot or be eaten by wild animals in the forest, they said.

PEOPLE FORCED TO JOIN "SWAN AA SHIN" GROUP, MONEY EXTORTED, IN MURNG-YARNG

In early 2008, people in **Murng-Yarng** township were forced by the SPDC authorities to join "Swan Aa Shin" Group or Organization, a civil group sponsored by the SPDC authorities and used in persecuting the people.

On 19 February 2008, SPDC military authorities of IB279 summoned the leaders and headmen of all the quarters and villages in Murng-Yarng town area to a meeting at the base of IB279 in Murng-Yarng town.

At the meeting, the commander of IB279 issued an order requiring all the leaders to provide 3 persons from each of the town quarters and villages to join and become members of an organization called "Sawn Aa Shin Athin", which could be roughly translated as "Lord of Power Team".

There were altogether 11 quarters and villages in the town area from which 33 persons were required to attend a 5-day training, from 22 to 27 February 2008, to learn about their mandate and duties before becoming members and returning to work at their respective places.

The 11 quarters or villages in Murng-Yarng town area were: Ho Kaad, Kaeng Hin, Pa Non, Murng Paeng, Kaeng Laek, Sae Taan, Haw Tai, Mawk Mai, Haw Kaang, Pa Mai and Mawn Ke.

The expenses for the organizing of the training were extorted from the people. The expenses for each person per day were designated at 6,000 kyat, therefore it was 30,000 kyat for 5 days. That meant each village or quarter had to provide 90,000 kyat of money with the 3 persons to attend the said training.

It was learnt that in most quarters and villages virtually no one wanted to join the said organization and it was necessary for the leaders to hire daily wage earners to fill up their quotas, at the rate of 5,000 kyat per person for the duration of the training.

FORCIBLE RECRUITMENT AND EXTORTION BY A CEASEFIRE GROUP CAUSES PEOPLE TO FLEE, IN LAI-KHA

In early 2008, a Shan ceasefire group randomly arrested young male villagers and forced them to serve as soldiers and extorted money from the parents of those who did not want to join them, in Naa Poi village tract, **Lai-Kha** township.

During the end of 2007 and the beginning of 2008, a Shan armed group, known locally only as "Murng Zern group" because its commander's name was Murng Zern, who has a ceasefire with the SPDC troops, attempted to recruit new members.

The ceasefire group was based in Naa Poi village tract in Lai-Kha township. The commander of the group, Murng Zern, told the village leaders in Naa Poi village tract to persuade their villagers to join his group, saying he would like to get about 4 recruits from each village, aged between 15 and 25.

However, even after some time, no one turned up and the commander became angry and ordered his troops to search and arrest young male villagers in Naa Poi village tract and forced them to join his group. During the month of January 2008, they arrested many young villagers at various places, including village fairs, VDO theatres and market places, etc..

The commander then coerced the young villagers to join his group. For those who really did not want to join, he extorted money from their parents, about 200,000 kyat for the release of each. For those who ran away without paying the money, he arrested their parents and demanded money 2-3 times higher, for their release.

This incident has caused especially many young male villagers in the said area to flee to other places during the early part of 2008, and many of them have later come to the Thai border and eventually to Thailand in search of means of survival.

TRADITIONAL COMMUNAL 'BEE TREE' DESTROYED IN MURNG-NAI

In early 2008, a tree traditionally valued and conserved by the local people was forcibly felled down and destroyed by the SPDC troops of LIB576, at Pa Saa village in Nawng Hee village tract, **Murng-Nai** township.

The tree was a kind of banyan, very big and tall and seemed to be hundreds of

years old. It was situated on the edge of Pa Saa village and was called 'bee tree' by the local villagers because bees used to build many hives on it every year.

Every year during the 'bee season', from around April to August, there were always 150 to 200 bee hives on the tree. After the bees abandoned their hives at the end of each season, villagers could produce hundreds of viss (1 viss = 1.6 kg) of bee wax each year for generations.

The bee wax was sold, at the price of 3,500 kyat per viss the last time, and the money was used to support the village Buddhist monastery so that the monks did not have to worry much about their living. This practice had been handed down from generation to generation since as long as the oldest living villagers could recall.

Therefore, the tree was traditionally valued and preserved by both monk and lay communities of Pa Sa village, who also regarded it as the symbol of peace, tranquility and stability of their village. That was why they were very protective of it when the authorities said they wanted to cut down the tree.

The SPDC authorities and officers from the electricity department said that the tree was in the area of a high voltage electricity line that was being constructed and needed to be removed. But the villagers, especially the abbot monk of the monastery, protested against it because the tree was still at least 80 arm-spans (1 arm-span = 2 yards) far away from the nearest electricity pylon.

Sometime in January 2008, however, as the abbot monk and some village leaders had gone on a pilgrimage to Mandalay and other places in central Burma, about 15-16 workers from the electricity department and some SPDC troops came and cut down the tree with chain-saw machines.

The work took several days to complete, but no one in the village dared do anything about it except watch it with deep regret. The abbot monk and the village leaders also could do nothing except regret the incident when they returned to see the tree was gone.

BULLYING OF CEASEFIRE GROUPS, AND DISPLAY OF POWER, IN MURNG-YARNG

In February 2008, SPDC troops in Murng-Yarng seized several vehicles belonging to ceasefire groups in **Murng-Yarng** township in a bullying display of power intended to teach them a lesson and remind them who was the boss.

On 21 February 2008, about 5-6 SPDC troops, led by Capt. Than Htun Aung, went to conscript a four-wheel-drive pickup truck that was parked in front of a house in Murng-Yarng town, because they wanted to go to Murng Pawk village.

When the Captain told a man in the house that he wanted to borrow it for a while, the man said he could not give it to him because the truck belonged to an officer of the United Wa State Army (UWSA), a ceasefire group based in the area. "Don't you see the 'UWSA' sign on it?," he said.

The SPDC Captain became angry and scolded the man, "How dare you defy my order, I can even confiscate it if I want to!" and ordered his men to get on the truck and forcibly took the key from the man, and he himself drove the truck away.

After that Capt. Than Htun Aung and his troops went around the town and its outskirts areas and arrested all the vehicles with ceasefire groups' signs they could find. Altogether 5 vehicles with the 'UWSA' sign and 3 vehicles with the 'NDAA', another ceasefire group in the area, sign were arrested and taken to the military base on that day.

The vehicles were kept at the military base for 3 days and the owners were summoned to the base on the afternoon of 24 February 2008 when all the vehicles were returned to them. But before returning the vehicles to the owners, Capt. Than Htun Aung gave them a brief reprimand.

“I can confiscate all the vehicles if I want to. But this is only intended to teach you a lesson, to show you who the boss is. Remember, don’t ever try to use ceasefire groups’ officers as an excuse to defy my order in the future. I was only borrowing the truck. Borrowing is much better than confiscating, isn’t it?,” he said.