

Report

When Frogs Eat Frogs: Systematic Abuses by DKBA Forces Against Karen Communities

A Karen proverb says, 'Frogs are extinct because they eat each other.' Now, like this proverb, the same ethnic groups oppress each other, so they will be extinct and get nothing beneficial.

A village headman in Kawkareik Township

In some cases, they [DKBA troops] are worse than the Burmese military. As they speak Karen language, they are defined as Karen, but their manner is the same as Burmese Army.

Atee Phoe Thar, a 63 year old resident of Kook Ka Rate, Karin State.

Summary:

The Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) will spend its April 2010 report documenting the continued deliberate abuse of predominantly Karen residents by forces from the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA). These findings come 1 year after HURFOM initially released a report detailing abuses committed by DKBA forces in Dooplaya District¹.

From early March to the third week of April, a team of field researchers from HURFOM has documented human rights abuses committed by soldiers from the DKBA against local residents in the areas of Kawkareik and Kyainnseiky townships. These areas remain contested by the armies of the SPDC and DKBA, sporadically engaging with elements of the insurgent Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Within these "black areas" or free fire zones, SPDC and DKBA armies do not restrict their use of lethal force, and government and proxy army units, such as the DKBA, are given an unwritten order to steal, extort, and arbitrarily tax residents as they see fit to provide for their units own survival and wealth.

HURFOM believes that as tensions have increased in relation to preparations by the SPDC for their 2010 election, and their relationship with the border ceasefire groups deteriorates, these troubles will lead to increased human rights abuses. It is crucial that the activities of the pro-government proxy army, the DKBA remain closely documented.

This report will detail the 3 primary abuses committed by DKBA forces during this period; extortion of goods and money, use of unpaid labor and porters, and torture. The DKBA, which has informally accepted the SPDC's request to refit as a subsidiary border guard force, has become nearly unrecognizable to area residents, who cite shared language as the only means of separating SPDC forces from those of the DKBA. To highlight the growing concern within the Karen community over the direction the DKBA has turned, HURFOM has included in the latter half of this report opinions from township residents' describing their experiences, reactions and thoughts regarding the DKBA's close partnership with the SPDC.

Methodology:

In order to observe and update human rights violations and abuses committed by both SPDC and DKBA armed groups, a documentation team from HURFOM has worked conducting interviews and gathering information in two predominantly Karen townships, Kawkareik and Kyainnseiky. Beginning on the 27th of the previous March, the 3 HURFOM field reporters interviewed residents and recorded the abuses committed by DKBA troops predominately from Dooplaya based Battalions No. 902, No. 907, No. 908 and No.999. Interviews were conducted in approximately 35 villages.

While this documentation effort will cover human rights violations occurring within the above two townships, these personal accounts of abuse and opinions on the DKBA were gathered from areas possessing intense

¹*Power through gun barrels: Abuses related to the DKBA offensive in Dooplaya District, HURFOM, April 2009*

security concerns and danger to both reporters and victims of abuse; these interviews therefore represent a fraction of abuses that have been committed by the DKBA within the two townships.

DKBA Army and Precedents of Abuse:

It is not wrong to say that Kawkareik and Kyainnseikiyi, the two townships targeted in this report, have been used as battlefields by the SPDC's army and the KNLA, the armed wing of the Karen National Union (KNU) over the last 50 years. Local civilians have had to make their lives among the conflict and gunfire for two generations, and in that time have experienced no headway towards a peaceful reconciliation or development to improve the region. Living as victims of war between the armed groups, many families have lost members or the lives they have developed there.

KawKareik and Kyainnseikiyi townships are part of the KNU administrated territory which is know as Dooplaya District. The Length of this area covers near half of the southern part of the Karen State, measuring approximately 160 km from north to south. Most of the villagers in the areas are composed of Karen communities or other ethnic minorities including Mon, Lao, Shan and some ethnic Burmese. Most of the villagers who live in western and central Dooplaya District make their living cultivating betel nuts, rubber trees, limes, sugarcane and cardamom seeds, while villagers in the eastern part of the district cultivate mainly tobacco and corn.

Since the beginning of 1997, previous Burmese military battalions have deployed greater numbers of troops and conducted major military operations in an attempt to control most of this area. To bolster this militarization the DKBA has become a often used proxy force when fighting in KNU controlled regions, as the DKBA split from the KNU/KNLA in 1994. In the last year the SPDC has formally requested that ceasefire armed groups participate in a retrofitting of their armed wings as a "Border Guard Forces" that would place them under the de facto control of the government. The DKBA, as it is already receiving supplies and logistical support from the SPDC, has tentatively agreed within its upper echelons of leadership. As was concluded from HURFOM's April 2009 report, violence on the part of the DKBA, and the continued siege of KNU territory with the SPDC, had undermined the lives of thousands of residents who have been driven from their homes. Abuses and displacement by the Karen forces of the DKBA has continued, with Karen civilians and communities being subject to abuses of theft and extortion, forced portering and labor, and acts of torture intended to gather information about the KNU.

Extortion in the Kawkareik Township DKBA Controlled Territory:

The following accounts of extortion committed by DKBA soldiers drains necessary daily income from residents who see little economic opportunity in the conflict battered region. While DKBA forces excuse the abuse as a tit for tat justification for assumed villager support to the KNU/KNLA, villagers individual experiences indicate that abuse continues regardless of any support to the KNU/KNLA.



A DKBA checkpoint is seen in Kawkareik District in December, 2010.

During the field research trips in March and April in Kawkareik township's DKBA controlled area, HURFOM researchers learned that the DKBA troops from Battalion No.999 have been extorting forced porter services fees from the predominantly ethnic Karen villagers who live in six villages in the southern part of the township.

Local residents told HURFOM researchers in their testimonies that the extortion and tax to avoid serving in the porter service started at the beginning of February of this year. An anonymous 37 year old Naung Nine villager, from Kawkareik township, Karen State said:

Captain Saw Ah ky, who comands the battalion's Military Column No. 3, demanded

to the headmen of Aung Pha Kyi village, Naung Nine village, Nang Shew Mon village, Aung Hpa Lay

village, Ywa Tan Shey village, and Thayet Than village; the letters reportedly informed that unless the villages from each settlement compiled a sum of 150,000 kyat per village to be picked up by the military column captain, villagers would be pressed into portering service for battalion's Military Column No. 3.

As was related to HURFOM's field researcher, the temporary² Captain of the DKBA Military Column No.3, Saw Ah Kyi ordered the villagers that his troops were collecting funds from each family and the amount of money collected would depend on the resident economic situation (depended on villagers' incomes). The 37 year old Naung Nine villager added, "Families with lower living standards or lower income were required to contribute 2,000 kyat, while households that earned greater incomes were required to contribute 5,000 kyat each."

A 51 year-old, female village headman who asked for not to report her name, explained frankly:

In the current situation, 25 Karen villages in Kawkariek Township have received the DKBA's orders (delivered, written on papers with a stamp bearing the DKBA seal). The perpetrating commander was Lt. Colonel Saw Maw Tho, the former commander of DKBA battalion No. 907, and his troops.

According to the village list collected by HURFOM's researcher on April 4th, the following are village names that have faced DKBA extortion efforts: Tone Set Tone Su, Dauk Pa Lan, Kyike Ta Like, Nan Shwe Hmone, Ku Don, Bot Die, Your Dann Shae, An Kaung, Haung Ta Yaw, An Pha Gyi, An Pha Lay, Thar Yar Gone, Your Tit, Set Ka Wet, Ka Htoe Hta, Aye Thin Hlaing, Kook Nwear, An Ka Law, Kaung Hmu, Hnaung Hnine, Myo Haung, Ta Maing Kone, Kyock Sa Lit Gone, Ta Yet Taw and Khar Kone.

At the beginning of April, Lt. Colonel Saw Maw Tho, the former commander of DKBA battalion No. 907, and his troops ordered that the villagers who live in about 25 Karen villages in Kawkariek Township had to collect 30 buckets of paddy [rice] per village to support the troops. The field researcher learned that the instruction came via the particular village headmen.

Saw San Htun, 48 years-old Tha Yet Taw villager who is a hand-to-mouth worker and has no permanent job, recounted disappointedly during an interview:

Please look at our village conditions – Some villages are just groups of houses that include 30 or 40 homes. We worked very hard to get food enough for one year. Some who have big family lack food and have to barrow money by making guarantees with their properties to solve food problem. 30 buckets per village is too heavy to give. If we do not pay, it is sure that the village is in trouble. Our life is in trouble again and again.

Saw San Htun add that the economic and living conditions in his Karen village are not hopeful and is troubled in many ways:

We have to collect rice now because they [DKBA] asked for it. I have to take responsibilities as a village headman For a compulsorily 3 months. No one wants to be the in-charge of this village. Everybody knows nearly all the situation of this village, so they don't want to be an in-charge. I will collect as many buckets as I can because I have no ability to refuse their orders, though the number of the paddy buckets I collected is under 10.

Most of the villagers in these communities have only received a poor education, have poor health, and work in hand-to-mouth jobs such that they are only able to focus on their daily sustenance. They work as manual laborers on area plantations but most of them cannot do anything effectively because of the consequence of abuses and armed groups' conflicts through their life. They do plantation as they can and have to eat a mixture of beans, corns and paddy kept for one year.

Kawkariek town residents reported to HURFOM's field researcher that during the second week of March residents believed that the DKBA had accepted the Burmese government's Border Guard Force (BGF) agreement because the DKBA had radically increased the number of DKBA operated checkpoints in the rural villages of Kawkariek Township. According to Ywa Tan Shey villagers who spoke with a HURFOM researcher, rates of cash, rice, trade goods, and raw materials demanded at each checkpoint have become so steep that many area residents, especially traders and truck drivers, have been forced to change employment merely to avoid the financial drain of DKBA checkpoint taxes.

²The DKBA rotates commanders of regional Battalions. When conducting research in the area field researches have found it important to note the status of commanders as one may oversee some abuses, but later be rotated out and new commander in turn may commit other abuses.

“After the DKBA set up new check points, they collected many kinds of taxes from both truck owners and traders,” a 40 year-old area resident named Ko Soe Myint explained. “I had to stop being a truck driver. I sold off my truck and found other work because it was too expensive. Many of my friends also had to stop being truck drivers.”

It is important to note that despite the widespread occurrences of extortion by the DKBA villagers retain their capacity to try and improve their situation. Below are two accounts highlighting instances of village agency in which area residents attempted to work with Monks to mitigate the abusive conditions cultivated by the DKBA³. The first account is gathered from an interview by a field reporter with Saw Thaug Kyi Myaing, the KNU Office Administrator in Kawkareik Township and Defense Officer of Pain Nae Gone village. Saw Thaug Kyi Myaing said that on April 5th a Buddhist Monk named U Pin Nyar, assistant to the senior Buddhist Monk Myaing Gyi Ngu (A founder and advisory board leader of the DKBA) delivered one statue of Buddha to each village including Tha Mine Gone village, Kawkareik Township. After the ceremony of offering the donations, the representatives of the 25 villages noted in the HURFOM list, appealed to Monk U Pin Nyar about the issue of demanded paddy by the DKBA. The representative requested that the DKBA:

- 1) Reduce the amount of buckets of rice demanded by DKBA because it makes it very difficult for villager to provide for their families.
- 2) To reconsider the use of unpaid laborers, porter services and demanding building materials from the villagers.

In order to defend the DKBA actions, the Monk replied, “You are supporting the KNU with money and supplies as well. Therefore, it is fair enough to support the DKBA with labor and porters because the DKBA are also Karen army forces who work for the Karen people. You also needed to support them with some of your rice as food supplies. You should not complaint about this.”

In reference to this case, a source close to the village headman of Ah Soon village, Kawkareik Township said, “We, civilians, are being abused by the SPDC army as they like. We had already been abused. Today’s case is not different from the SPDC’s. We cannot report anything. They only know what they want to know and are not different from the SPDC army.”

In the second case recounted on March 29th by a young monk from Pain Nae Gone village, Kawkareik Township who declined to give his name and age, he responded to a request by villagers to help negotiate a lowered demand from the DKBA:

Two days ago [On March 27], my followers in the village requested that I appeal to the DKBA Battalion No. 908 [to decrease its] demand for 70 Pate Thar (1 Pate Thar = 1.63 kg) of pork when the DKBA entered the village. The villagers have been offering food to me, and I think I should take responsibilities for them, so I went to the battalion to talk with the commander. He (the commander of DKBA Battalion No. 908) said that a monk should do a monk’s tasks, ordered that I don’t interfere in this case and drove me out by pointing his gun at me. Therefore, I came back disappointed.

Unpaid Labor and Portering Service Committed by DKBA:

The use of area villagers as unpaid labor, porters and even land-mine cleaners is an abuse that has been widely practiced by the SPDC in construction projects, village relocations, and military campaigns throughout Burma. The DKBA implementation of portering and labor abuse against ethnically Karen communities has inarguably been a catalyst in souring local Karen opinion of the DKBA and its close affiliation with the SPDC.

According to a source close to the village headmen from Mi Na Than village, on March 26th, the combine forces of Burmese LIB No. 357 commanded by Lt. Col. Thet Naing Soe and DKBA battalion No. 908 demanded that local villagers from Mi Na Than village make 10 bamboo baskets (1.5 ft diameter x 4 ft) for carrying ammunition and weapons:

About 17 male villagers have to make the required amount of baskets within one day with no payments. The villagers finished making in the evening. After that the joint forces arrested others 12 villagers as porters, put ammunition and equipments on each baskets and let the 12 villagers to carry its. On April 2 all villagers went back from the porter services.”

³For further reading regarding the role of villager agency in community maintenance and empowerment, please see the Karen Human Rights Group’s (KHRG) November 2008 report *Village Agency: Rural right and resistance in militarized Karen State*.



A village under full control of the DKBA is seen in Kawkareik Township in January, 2010.

A villager reported to HURFOM's researcher, who visited a temporary resettlement site in KNU territory, that starting in the second week of January 2010, large numbers of Kwee Noh Htar villagers were forced to perform manual labor for both DKBA and SPDC troops for an extended period of time. This source claimed that he and his fellow villagers were forced to dig trenches, build fences around the battalions' base camps, and build barracks; these individuals were given no time to work in their own farms and

gardens, and instead were made to contribute all of their time to performing unpaid labor. This source informed HURFOM that Kwee Noh Htar villagers soon lacked sufficient food to feed their families, and starting in mid-February, victims began fleeing from the village to safety two miles away, in territory controlled by KNU Brigades No. 1, No. 3 and No. 5.

“Too many times we have had to work for both the DKBA and SPDC troops – we have no food for our families to eat for survival. We have no time to work on farms to get food and income. After we discussed this with each other we decided we must leave the village. If we had continued living there we were all going to die,” explained Saw Lay Phoe, a 45 year-old Kwee Noh Htar villager. According to HURFOM's field reporter, most of the Kwee Noh Htar villagers who are taking shelter in KNU territory were dangerously underweight and exhibited significant signs of malnourishment. In particular, children from the village were extremely thin and most had swollen stomachs.

Victims informed HURFOM's researcher that both DKBA and SPDC troops subjected villagers to a rotating system for the unpaid labor they were forced to perform. Villagers who failed to show up to role-call were often beaten, placed in stocks, or fined.

According to another victim who spoke to HURFOM's researcher in KNU territory, the villagers were not even permitted to know the identities of their tormentors. Reportedly, the SPDC troops refused to reveal their battalion number to the villagers, and when victims asked soldiers for this information, the soldiers simply replied, “What are you going to do?”

“I was not happy with the DKBA after what they did to us, because they are also Karen but they treated us the same as animals,” a Kwee Noh Htar resident told HURFOM. “As for Burmese troops, it is ok for them [to treat us like that] because they are not Karen – they don't need to take care of Karen people – but as for the DKBA I am angry with them.”

According to information received by a HURFOM researcher from an anonymous KNU official in the first week of March 2010, more than 100 villagers from Kawee Noe village, in Karen State's Pa'an Township, have fled from their homes into KNU territory, after undergoing several weeks of forced labor at the hands of the DKBA and the SPDC.

Torture committed by DKBA Battalions No.908 and No. 907 in Kawkareik Territory:

In these accounts area residents have been tortured by DKBA forces both as punishment and to extract information from residents about the movement of KNLA forces. These abuses, like portering, have embodied a change in DKBA operation in black areas closer to that of the SPDC, in which local Karen civilians are often treated a priori as enemy informants/ supporters.

On March 18th, A group of DKBA soldiers under the command of 40 year old Saw Bee Gyi, from Battalion No. 908, entered to the Mi Na Than village, Kawkareik Township, assaulted and repeatedly struck the head

of a villager named Saw Pha Lar, 20, accusing him of being linked with KNU. Saw Pha Lar was hospitalized and operated in Kawkareik public hospital after being beaten. A friend of the victim's father, Saw Phe Maung, 61, described what happened:

DKBA commander Saw Bee Gyi accompanied by 20 privates from DKBA battalion No. 908, reached this village, (Mi Na Than village), at 7:30 PM and arrested a 20 year old ethnic Karen man, Saw Pha Lar, and beat his head with a bamboo stick until he lost consciousness. I thought he was dead. No one dared to stop him [Saw Bee Gyi]. The DKBA Commander accused him of being connected with the KNU.

[They] asked Saw Pha Lar for his AK-47 and his radio set before they beat Saw Pha Lar. Saw Pha Lar begged and protested, saying that he had no idea about what the DKBA Commander, Saw Bee Gyi, was asking him. After [he gave these things] to them he was beaten [again] several times on his head with a bamboo stick which was found near by.



DKBA soldiers from Battalion No. 906 are seen outside Kyainnseiky Township during the 1st week of April, 2010.

On February 23rd, another victim of torture named Saw Nyunt Maung, a 39 year old hand to mouth laborer from Mi Na Than village, was kicked in the back with soldier's boots several times because he failed to report the activities of the KNU and its armed wing, the KNLA, during his sentry duty.

At that time, I was on my duty along with another four friends from my village. In the evening, about 8:20 PM, the commander of DKBA No. 907, military column No.3, Saw Kha Li and Saw Hpar Htaw and their unit - about 30 privates - ordered me to come closer to him and then kicked me with his heavy boot in my back without saying anything. Then, he yelled at me that I am a stupid villager as I did not notice the activities of KNU and KNLA during my guard duty on Feb 23. I felt so much pain. I thought my back was broken at that time. After they left me some of my friends came and help me to their hiding place. I got a very serious pain [in my back] sometimes because of this injury. My wife is now taking care of me and my two kids and I really feel bad because she has to work very hard to cover our daily food costs. I hope my back will get better [so I am able] to help my wife.

Another similar incident occurred in Mi Na Than village when the DKBA commander found that a villager, Saw Mu Too, 46, a local farmer from Mi Na Than, had fallen asleep at his sentry duty. Saw Mu Too recounted the circumstances as to why the command beat him and the result of the beating:

Second Commander Saw Hpar Htaw, 38, and his 5 troops from No. 907 military column No.3 punched my face several times and because of that my nose was broken. At that time, I was so tired I fell asleep during my duty on village security along with other villagers. That Commander was younger than me and he is also Karen. I felt very angry but did not dare to do anything. He also threatened the other villagers who were taking village sentry duties that "If you fell asleep while you are on duty, I will come and kill you all".

On March 26th, during an operation under the combine forces of DKBA Battalion No. 907 and No. 908 and Burmese Army LIB No. 357, to prepare for their efforts to engage the KNLA Battalion No. 18 in the southeast part of Kawkareik territory, some troops from the combine forces tortured local inhabitants in the area. According to different sources amongst local residents, these joint forces of the Burmese army and DKBA have aimed at reducing the recruitment, provision of shelter, intelligence and assistance (foods and equipment) provided to KNLA troops by local inhabitants.

An eyewitness to torture, Saw Kasaw, a 41 year old resident of Asoon village, Kawkareik Township, described what happened when a shop owner was caught selling batteries to a NKLA soldier for his raido:

The DKBA troops from battalion No.907 and No.908 were led by Commander Saw Maw Tho and the Burmese army battalion was operated by Commander Thet Naing Soe. They reached Asoon village on

Information on HURFOM and Invitation for Feedbacks from Readers

Dear Readers,

Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) was founded in 1995, by a group of young Mon people. The main objectives of HURFOM are:

- Monitoring the human rights situation in Mon territory and other areas in southern Burma
- Protecting and promoting internationally recognized human rights in Burma,

In order to implement these objectives, HURFOM produces the monthly "Mon Forum" newsletters. If publication is delayed it is because we are waiting to confirm information, and it comes with our heartfelt apologies.

We encourage you to write to us if you have feedback or if you know someone who you think would like to receive the newsletter. Please email or mail a name and address to:

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Bangkok 10501, THAILAND
E-mail: hurfomcontact@yahoo.com
Website: <http://www.rehmonnya.org>

With regards,

Director
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

the afternoon of March 26th. The next morning I witnessed three DKBA privates from Commander Saw Maw Tho take a village named Saw A Naing, 32, and made him sit on the ground. Another three soldiers kicked him in his face with their boots several times while inquiring about the activities of the KNLA around the village. Commander Saw Maw Tho and his followers accused Saw A Naing of providing equipment support to a soldier from KNLA battalion No.18. In reality, Saw A Naing used to sell some AA size batteries to KNLA soldiers for their two-way radios. I saw his (Saw A Naing) face was full of blood.

Villager Opinions on the DKBA:

One key trend noted by field researchers when speaking with area villagers is that the only means by which they are able to recognize DKBA members as Karen is by their speaking the Karen language. Villagers' struggle to separate DKBA forces from those of the SPDC is a shocking trend that implies that the abuses committed by DKBA forces both in type and volume mirror the SPDC to such a degree that their treatment of ethnically identical Karen civilians is same as actions by the SPDC.

Saw Phoe Thar, a 63 year old resident of Kyar Ma Naing village, Kyainnseikyi township expressed his disappointment that the manner of the DKBA does not differ from that of government army:

If people from this areas speak any of Karen languages, we say that they are Karen. However, the manner of the Karen armed groups like the DKBA is the same with the SPDC. They are not different from the Burmese because of their long relationship with the Burmese since they agreed to stop fighting. They do not remember how our people use to support them in the past. They have forgotten. Now they are collecting money from villagers and using the villagers as their slaves whenever they operate offensives against a rebel armed group like the KNU. We have been forced to share our paddy [rice], livestock and even our money. We villagers have to serve as porters, otherwise if not they ask for money. If there is no money, they will take anything we have. This manner is no different from the Burmese soldiers. In some cases, they are worse than Burmese army.

Describing his opinion of the DKBA ceasefire group, a well-known and respected Karen monk and community leader who lives in Kyainnseikyi town complained that the DKBA action is contrary to Buddhist teachings:

The mistake started from their 'Association' and 'Army' title. The word 'Buddha' should not be include in their name. In my opinion, the emblem of Damasatkyar should not be used together. They behave totally against the Buddhism. Moreover, the top leaders have good relationship with the government and work only for their own profit. There is a big gap in living standards and supplies between the leaders and the soldiers, thus the soldiers are out of control. They think the guns are to be used for earning money and so they do as they like. As the result, the local inhabitants are very poor and continue to be impacted by these abuses. As a Karen, I feel very unhappy.

A researcher interviewed a 54 year-old man, living in Htee Nyar village, Kyainnseiky Township, who has extensive local politic knowledge, on his opinion of the potential DKBA BGF change:

An ordinary tiger is very bad. If it becomes a supernatural tiger, you can guess how bad it will be. I predict that the civilians are in trouble....It is not that they [DKBA] do not know about these [conditions]. They already know. They bully us even though they know. One fact to think about is that in order to make us not able to support the KNU they demand our supplies in advance.

In any respect, they should not demand [our supplies]. They must gain a lot of rice because there are 25 villages in total. A Karen proverb says, 'Frogs are extinct because they eat each other.' Now, like this proverb, the same ethnic groups oppress each other, so they will be extinct and get nothing beneficial.



DKBA soldiers Battalions No. 907 and No. 906 take sentry duty near Three Pagoda Pass town in December 2009.

Conclusion:

While having decisively split from the KNU, the DKBA has claimed that it has looked after the interests of, and represented, the Karen community. But the disturbing trend highlighted in this report seems to indicate that DKBA and SPDC forces have become nearly indistinguishable for local residents. This similarly has reinforced the significant number of human rights abuses DKBA soldiers and leadership have committed against Kawkareik and Kyainnseiky Karen residents. While wagging their campaign to destroy the KNLA, the practice of extorting funds and supplies from local residents; using Karen residents as porters, laborers and human shields; and torturing residents to met out punishment or exact information, has done little to secure the favor of the Karen community.

With the SPDC aiming to resolve the issue of armed ethnic ceasefire groups before the slated 2010 election, tensions in communities along Burma's borders have increased. HURFOM hopes to highlight the significance a return to arms will have on its effort to document abuses committed by both SPDC and DKBA forces. A significant return to arms will likely increase instability and include travel restrictions, extreme security risks, and widespread civilian displacement. Given the DKBA's stance with the SPDC, HURFOM is concerned that human rights abuses as well as direct action against civilians in conflict zones will rise dramatically. Without greater support or a more robust effort at documenting abuses at this time it is more then likely open war will be used to justify abuses that will occur in the absence of human rights researchers or observers.

* Editors note: that the names of villagers, village headmen, addresses of the villagers who live in dangerous or unsafe areas, and the names of abusers have been rewritten to insure the security of interviewees and HURFOM field researchers.

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