

Report

“Our Village Will Not Last:” Analysis of Abuses Conducted Against Civilians in Mon State and Tenneserim Division

INTRODUCTION

It is not easy to make any claim that Burma is a nation free of violence and armed conflict. However the Burmese military regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), often cites the successful brokering of 15 ceasefires with armed insurgent groups, who have been brought ‘back into the legal fold’ throughout the late 80’s and early 90’s, as proof that it has brought peace to Burma. These ceasefires have radically altered the landscape of the civil war in Burma by bringing the direct conflict with most of the ethnic armed groups to a close. However what has resulted is not peace, but a quieter violence, between smaller insurgent groups that did not sign ceasefires, and the Burmese army. This supposed peace has been characterized by continued violence and abuse conducted against civilians in parts of Karen State, Mon State, and Tenneserim Division who have been trapped between insurgent groups, and the Burmese policy of total destruction of its opposition. During August, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland-Burma (HURFOM) has focused its concern on the continuing abuses and serious human rights violations in Southern Burma and would like to highlight ongoing rights abuses faced by the local inhabitants and the consequences these have on the livelihoods of these residents. HURFOM field reporters have been documenting instances of forced relocation, land and property confiscation, arbitrary extortion and sexual violence through the testimonies of these individual victims, since March 2009.

This report will be broken in to 4 sections. After beginning with an exploration of the recent driving factors behind Burmese army action in the area, the report will offer some analysis on the data collected from victims of abuse in the area. This section is divided into the 4 most damaging abuses committed in the area, arbitrary taxation, depopulation, seizer of land and property, and sexual abuse. The closing section documents instances of villager resistance, where by their own agency villagers attempt to mitigate the negative impacts and abuses of living in this area.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The scope of testimonies and cases in this report have been gathered by HURFOM field reporters inside Burma in the areas of Yebyu and Ye townships inside southern Burma. Accounts of abuse were documented though interviews conducted by three filed reporters in targeted areas or through interviews with victims who had already fled their homes to either other safer villages or the Thai-Burma boarder. Real names are not included to protect the identity of those involved. Due to an increase in the number of SPDC army camps and seriously restricted travel in the targeted areas, the data collected here is a sample of the much broader systematic abuses conducted by Burmese army forces.

BACKGROUND

Beginning in early December 2008, various Burmese army battalions, managed by the SPDC’s Military Operations Management Command (MOMC) No. 8¹ of the coastal regiment command, have launched a sustained offensive against Mon armed insurgent groups and the KNLA² troops in the areas between the northern Yebyu of Tenneserim division and southern part of Ye Township, Mon State. By the end of July 2009, the continuous offensive had affected nearly 30% of the total population, displacing over 30,000³ ethnic Mon, Karen and Tavoyan civilians due to serious human rights violations.

¹ *Military Operation Management Command of the SPDC*

² *Brigade No. 4 of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the armed wing of the Karen National Union (KNU).*

³ *During 2006, HURFOM conducted a survey on the number of local people who have been directly affected by ongoing conflicts between local insurgent groups and the Burmese Army. At that time HURFOM documented 40,000 displaced persons from northern Yebyu and southern Ye township. The number of people stated above has been separately documented, after the 2006 survey.*

In this offensive, the Burmese Army's, Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 282, 273, and Infantry Battalion (IB) No. 31, which is based at Khaw Zar sub-township of Ye township, sent nearly 800 troops into the areas to launch attacks against 70 soldiers from the Mon insurgent armed groups⁴ Rahmonya and Nai Chen Deng, and smaller unnamed insurgent groups. Additionally, Burmese Navy forces from Mawyawaddy (navy troops) based at Moulmein, Mon State, also committed several cases of human rights abuses against local villagers from northern Tenasserim Division and southern Ye township. This well organized military campaign has been aimed, not only to win the continued war against insurgent groups, but, according to local military watchdog groups, as psychosocial campaign against the civilian population to end support by Mon villagers for the insurgent groups.

This campaign of purposeful rights violations by the Burmese Army has come to embody a policy similar to the 'Four Cuts' campaign that began in 1989. The 'Four Cuts' campaign, called "Hpyat lay hpyat", was designed effectively as a scorched earth offensive, starving insurgent groups of food, recruits, information, and shelter. Areas subject to the campaign were declared 'free-fire zones' by the SPDC, giving Burmese soldiers free reign to commit abuses against villagers and 'shoot to kill', making little distinction between insurgent soldiers, and regular civilians. Entire swaths of the area were cleared of villages, and thus support, for insurgent groups⁵.

Similarly, in the current offensives, the Burmese Army has attempted to enforce a policy of complete destruction of support systems, committing abuse intended to make civilian support of insurgent forces impossible.

Throughout this offensive, many villagers have been relocated, forced to pay large amounts of money as taxes, and have been detained and tortured over accusations of being rebel-supporters. Civilians face complete travel restrictions, unable to leave their villages and banned from going out to work in their own farms. Some villagers, including women, have been seriously beaten when the Burmese soldiers found them outside of their homes. Women have also suffered sexual harassment, rape and gang-raped by the Burmese soldiers. Many have fled from their homes to escape such sexual assault displaced not only in Mon State, but also to the Thai-Burma border.

The Burmese army has deployed more troops in Tenasserim division 2003 to keep the area under firm SPDC control. While the Burmese Army has overrun several rebel bases, it has been unable to successfully rout or suppress continued armed insurgent activity. Due to the use of guerrilla tactics to continue fighting Burmese Army forces, the area remains out of SPDC control, and if thus deemed unstable, a justification by the army for its actions. The subsequent abuses of arbitrary taxation, intentional depopulation, sexual assault, land and property seizure, and other human rights violations that result from this offensive affect villagers rights to life and property, daily.

The following 4 sections will contain individual accounts of abuse and human rights violations that villagers have faced, and analysis of these documented cases within the context of the SPDC goals mentioned above.

Arbitrary Taxation:

Amongst the most pernicious of abuses practiced by troops in the SPDC's recent campaign of violence and abuse in northern Yebyu and southern Ye Township, has been arbitrary taxation. Consistently villagers find themselves trapped between trying to meet the demands for money from insurgent groups, and the arbitrary taxes the local battalions demand to undermine villager support of the same insurgent groups, regardless of whether they have or have not had contact with any group.

According to residents near Kywe Thone Nyima village, army forces based in the area have used security concerns as justification for collecting



Villages are forced to perform road repairs near Yapu village in November 2008.

⁴ *The Burmese Army also launched offensives against this Mon splinter group in Yebyu Township, in the northern part of Tenasserim Division, with the extended force of the Burmese Navy of Mawyawaddy Regional Command which is based in Moulmein city, Mon State.*

⁵ *Smith, Martin Burma - Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity (Zed Books Ltd.: London, 1993).*

additional taxes in their village. This arbitrary taxation for supposed security purposes has diminished the income of many villagers, making it difficult for them to survive in the area.

Mi Cho, a 17 year-old villager from Kywe Thone Nyima village, Yebyu Township, explains how his village is trapped between paying insurgent groups, and avoiding subsequent additional fines, or violence, from the local battalion:

Village headman Nai Mg Shwe, who is 56 years old, forced villagers to pay 5,000 to 10,000 kyat to the Mon insurgent group, Rahmonnya. We have about 200 to 300 households. In early August, Nai Mg Shwe called all the villagers to discuss the options for giving Rehmonnya 5,000,000 kyat and the decision was made to collect 5,000 from each household. Our villagers didn't let the Burmese battalion that's located outside our village know about this. The Burmese troops and the insurgent forces try and find out the operations of each other. So villagers get problems with their fighting in the area. Most of the villagers needed to borrow money to pay the insurgent group. That's the reason for leaving my village; I can find a job in the border area. I hope I can send money back to my family [that's] there. Now I am working to tap the rubber.

During the second week of May, LIB No. 104 based in Long Lon village, Lieutenant Colonel Swe Thint and 50 soldiers forced villagers to pay 2,000,000 kyat during an attempt to clear insurgent groups out of Kalaingnyaw village.

Ko Nge, a 20 year-old villager from Kalaingnyaw explains how they had to pay the 2,000,000 kyat or risk losing their village.

Lieutenant colonel Swe Thint suspected our village had communicated with the insurgent groups. So, he asked to meet with the village headman; however the village headman got very sick, and lay down at home. So instead Swe Thint went to meet with abbot in the village. He said, 'If you don't give the amount that we asked, we will destroy your village.' But the abbot also told him that our village doesn't have any communication with insurgent groups. Finally, the abbot promised him [Swe Thint] the village would pay the money that he ask for. Every family has to pay over 10,000 per household. Our family had to sell two cows in Yebyu township to afford paying for the money they are extorting form us. Now, my parents don't have anything left for their livelihood. I hope to get more income to help my family, and came here to the border area to find a suitable job in."

Maung Ngan village has faced similar problems from arbitrary taxation as Kalaingmyaw. Maung Ngan village had about 90 households in 2004, however now most of the villagers have fled due to years of excessive arbitrary taxation and abuse.

According to the Ko Hlaing Oo, a 30 year old Maung Nagan villager, the excess taxation of insurgent forces and SPDC troop drove him from his village, to seek a job that would provide money for his family still at home:

In the second week of June, one of the Mon insurgent groups entered our village. They kidnapped three boats with the three boat's drivers, and put them in the middle of the sea. After that, they demanded 2,000,000 [kyat] for each boat. Our village needed to pay 6,000,000 [kyat] to get back the people and the boat. When the Mawyawaddy Navy Headquarters [MNH] heard about the situation, MNH's Major Khin Mg Oo came to our village. Major Khin Mg Oo called the headman U Suu and his secretary, then beat them in front of the villagers. The Major demanded the same amount of money that we already paid the insurgent group. They troops also kicked the villagers who negotiated for paying a smaller amount of money. However after that the Major Khin Mg Oo decided to only demand 2,000,000 kyat. At the end of the June, our villagers had to pay that amount of money to the MNH. My family had a debt to pay of over 100,000 [kyat]. I knew my parents couldn't afford to pay back the money with their income; therefore, I left from the village and am trying to support them.

Burmese army battalions have also justified the arbitrary taxation carried out in the area as necessary for spending on local development projects. This form of taxation takes money from village households, supposedly to cover the costs of the construction project. Adding insult to injury, villagers are often required to then work as uncompensated manual labor on the project.

During the last year, Burmese troops based near Kywe Thone Nyima village have been collecting money and forcing villagers to work extending the battalion barracks. Soldiers from MNH have ordered that one person

from each household must work on the building extension project. If villagers can't supply a person to work, the household must pay to excuse themselves from the forced labor.

A 30 year old, Kywe Thone Nyima villager who wished to remain unnamed, describes the difficulty of having to work as forced laborer or pay a fine to the local battalion:

In the first week of June 2009, Captain Zay Yar, 32 years old, commend village headman Nai Mg shwe to collect one male from every household [for work]. We started in June, alternating every 60 [days], approximately, to work on the barracks building. They [troops] forced 30 villagers to work on the building every day. The troops forced us to carry and split wood. One of our neighbors Daw Yone had to pay 7,000 kyat to Captain Sa Yar because she doesn't have a male in her house. Daw Yone is also a widow and a day laborer in the village. Even though Daw Yone went to village headman Nai Mg Shwe to request money, he said 'you are the one in this situation, you can get yourself out of it – it's not my concern.'... If we keep going like this, our village will not last for the future.

Similar to project construction, villagers are forced to perform roles that the military would conventionally fill. Burmese army troops will guard a town, ostensibly to keep insurgent forces out; However, villagers are forced to stand as a perimeter guard, shielding the army troops from immediate insurgent attack. For those who do not want to fill this role, or who cannot, villagers must pay a tax for the soldiers to perform their job.

Nai Kyi, a 43 year-old farmer from Kywe Thone Nyima village explains about these security issues in his town:

Mostly troops from the Navy Headquarter are based in our village. Captain Myit Wai gave the reason for their presence as providing security, and collected money from the villagers. They collected 3,000 kyat for security each month. However, they [troops] didn't set up security guards outside the village, they just stayed inside the village. Instead, they forced villagers to guard outside the village. Although they collected money in the village [for security], they instead forced the villagers to guard as security outside the village. During last three months, I have been forced to guard as village security for the last 7 times. If villagers are absent for [being] a security guard, you have to pay 3,000 [kyat] in fines. My father and younger brother's house have been fined 30,000 kyat from being absent from their security responsibility. My uncle doesn't have son and he was also unhealthy. But Captain Myit Wai didn't consider this and fined him 30,000 kyat.

In some cases villages are overwhelmed, not by paying a single large cost, but many small costs. Besides taxes from local battalions and insurgent groups, villagers can face other arbitrary taxes from government administrative organizations.

Naing Soe Naing, a 29 year-old from Alaesakhan village, Yebyu Township detailed some of these arbitrary taxes his village faces:

Collecting money has increased in our village. Both the Burmese battalion and Mon Rehmonnya are collecting money from our village. The reasons for collecting the money are: villager security cost – 1,000 kyat, taxes to battalion and militia groups – 500 kyat, village development and VIP travel – 500 kyat, rental for a motorbike, truck for a commander, or patrol – 500 kyat.

Nai Pho Htwe, a 45 year-old farmer from Alaesakhan village, Yebyu Township explains the effects this overwhelming arbitrary taxation can have:

Villagers have to give directly to the LIB No. 282 battalion commander and his comrades. In addition, the Village Peace and Develop Council [VPDC] has been collecting money from the villagers. In our village, we have about 600 – 700 households. The authorities get a lot of money every month. Also, the military and other authorities know that our villager crop is betel nut and that our son and daughter are working in Thailand. That's the reason the authorities try to pressure more tax [from us]. By working on my farm, I get just enough for my family to spend. I can't afford for my children to go to school. If we continue to live here, absolutely, we will have to continue paying the military battalion. Therefore, I decide that we will leave from this village. At the movement, I am trying to find a job in the border area.

Intentional Depopulation:

Over last six months, HURFOM has been documenting the abuse by Burmese Army forces working to remove or relocate villagers in northern Yebyu Township, Tenasserim Division. Most of these cases of abuses

occur in relation to the activities of Mon insurgent groups, called Nai Chan Dein Group, and a newly formed group called Nai Khin Maung⁶. The very obvious goal is that without the support of area villages – willing or forced – insurgent group support structures will be undercut.

Nai Kon Aye, a 56 year-old farmer whose home was burned after being forced to move from Amae village, located at northern Yebyu township, Tenasserim Division reported to HURFOM field reporters that early May:

We have been forced to leave our home by Burmese Navy Force because of these Mon rebel groups. They came and asked quotas of huge amount of financial support from us several times. As a consequence, each time the Burmese Navy, who had been patrolling near the village, threatened [that] all of us [would have] to move by accusing us of being in contact with the Mon rebel armed group.

Mi Khun Kyi, a 55 year-old villager, who left Khayan village with her friend Nai Win, explains about the depopulation of her village, and her decision to leave:

I grew up and stayed in this [Khayan] village while I was a child. But the situation in 2009 has made us leave our village. In May, Burmese soldiers destroyed all our family's life reducing us to poverty. In May, we have paid 50,000 for extortion taxes to the LIB No. 282. We didn't have jobs to get that amount of money. Our property was then take during the increasing extortion of taxes. Therefore, our family decided to leave from our village. Since, we have decided to say here [northern Ye township] permanently as long as we can. This area is silent because it is a little far from the SPDC forces. If we compare our location before with now, this area [Northern Ye Township] is more suitable for our family. I will not go back there [old village] if the Burmese troops have been there. Now, I think, there are just 70 households left in the village. Our family also can't go back there because we left from our village in secret.”



Villagers flee to the Thai-Burma border from Ye and Yebyu Townships in southern Burma during the cold season of 2004.

Nai Aung Hsein from Byaik village describes the situation in which LIB No. 282 forcibly depopulated his entire village after finding out his village had had contact with insurgent forces, but had not reported it:

In early May 2009, A company from LIB No. 282, lead by lieutenant Myint Mg...entered into Byaik and went to see the village headman, Nai Suu Nage, a 47 year old ethnic Tavoyan, and his secretary Nai Sein Mae who is 43. [They] asked about the insurgent groups activities. While asking, they also beat them with bamboo sticks because they said the village headman didn't tell them about insurgents visiting before. After they beat him, they arrested the village headman. They called all villagers and commanded them that 'you have to leave your village in one week'. Our village has 45 households. Some of the ethnic Tavoy relocated to the Yebyu Township and our ethnic Mon moved to Northern Ye Township in Zebyutanug, Lamine Ywathit, Kharot-kharee villages.

Nai Soe Myint, a Kalaingnyaw villager, explains how the SPDC forces used excessive arbitrary taxation to drive him and other villagers from the village:

Our village paid two times for both groups during this year. The first time was 2,000,000 [kyat] and second was 1,500,000 [kyat] for both the rebels and SPDC forces. The [SPDC] troops really want to destroy small villages like ours because they want to combine all the small villages into one village. It's easier for them to control all village from communicating with the rebel groups. [if they cannot destroy the village] the troops

⁶ Which is directly managed by Nai Shound, a former lieutenant Colonel of the New Mon State Party

make a reason from [villages] communicating with insurgent groups, and then collecting a huge amount of money from the village. Finally, the villagers can't afford the extortion of money and have to leave from the village. The [SPDC] troops already know the strategy will work for them. Now we have to leave our village.

Nai Plai, related to Mi Cho, described the gravity of the situation on Kywe Thone Nyima Island, and the effect of the Mawyawaddy Navy Headquarter [MNH] activities in the area in early August:

Now, about 70% of the young men have left the village to find a job in other areas because most of families don't have enough income or money to pay the tax of either the insurgent group or the local Burmese battalion. I also am hoping to help my family's income. But, work here is not supporting me because we get only 70 Baht per day. Before I came here, my family had to pay 3,000 kyat to the Burmese soldiers [from MNH] every single month. ... all families in the village had to pay this same thing. Village headman Nai Mg shwe always asked villagers for more money then the SPDC asked him to collect. He always try to keep some leftover for himself.

There are about 200 or 300 households on Kywe Thone Nyima Island. Most people survive by farming rice, fishing and cultivating crops. Previously the village had possessed a very strong economy, as the residents around the area were able to take advantage of the village's location. However, because of its distance from more populated areas and cities, it has suffered greater instances of abuse; without oversight, there is little accountability for abuses conducted against villagers by local military authorities and insurgent groups, who seek to extort money through 'taxes', and carry out other human rights violations.

Sexual Assault:

Though condemned by the SPDC on paper, the human rights violation of Sexual assault sadly continues as an abuse committed by SPDC troops in the area. Due to security concerns for victims, as well as the threat to those who spoke about such assaults, this is the only case this report has been able to document in detail.

During an SPDC operating against the Mon insurgent group ,Rehmonnya, several women were raped by soldiers from the MNH in Magyi village. A HURFOM field report was able to interview a person who witnessed the assaults on August 8th.

aid Nai Kyi, Magyi villager.

At about 11:00 am on August 8, when I went to the southern part of the sea to find some turtle eggs, I saw 3 young girls rapped by 5 soldier on a farm. The 3 young girls screamed for help, but no one was around there. The 3 girls are around 20 to 25 [years old]. One girl was [gang] rapped by 3 soldiers and the other 2 were raped one at a time. I needed to hide in a brush because I had to make sure the soldiers did not see me. If they had seen me – I strongly can say they would have shot me. When they finished rapping the girls they [soldiers left from that place. I think those solders were from the Navy troops that are based in A Phit village, Yebyu Township.

Because of this rape case, a HURFOM field reporter went to confirm the information in a separate interview. A Mon teacher in that area verified that is what had happened in the assault. "Yes, this rape case did happen with 3 young Mon girls, but we can't say their name for their own security. That is always happening for the Mon women because the military troops take advantage of our ethnic people. We can't do anything about it at the movement. All we can do is just keep watch."

Land and Property Seizer:

The abuse of land and property seizer serves a dual purpose for Burmese army units. First, having enacted a policy of "self reliance", the SPDC encourages its units to gather any resources they can from area villagers, ostensibly to keep maintenance costs of their own unit down. Second, the seizer of the few resources villagers possess works towards the previously stated SPDC goal of undercutting village capacities to survive, thus denying insurgent groups opportunities to gather resources for themselves.

In July 2009, Captain Khing Mg Kyin of Battalion No. 273 divided his force to patrol separately in the Alaesakhan village area. The troops money and goods belonging to villagers and vehicle passengers who were

crossing through the area. The troops justified the confiscation and tax, saying that they were just collecting money for their food supplies.

Ma Yin Aye, a 40 year-old Alaesakhan villager, explains how her and other passengers' money and goods were sized after being stopped at a check point:

We need to provide something for their food. The soldiers stopped our car and tried to check all the passengers' goods as if they were trying to find drugs. I knew the captain, Khing Mg Kyin. He is from the LIB No. 273. He didn't allow our car to go and said each passenger had to pay 2,000 kyat each. We had about 20 passengers into our truck. He also took one container of cooking oil and some vegetables from our truck. In addition, he also took one carton [10 packages] of cigarettes.



A concrete pillar is seen marking land already confiscated by the local SPDC battalion.

Lort Taing residents also reported that captain Khing Mg Kyin, and soldiers from LIB No. 273 were shooting villagers chickens, pigs and ducks to taking them as food from villagers, without permission.

U Kalar, a 60 year old Kyaukadin villager also described his encounter from soldiers from LIB No. 273 killing and taking his son's livestock for their own food.

Last month, LIB No. 273 captain Khing Mg Kyin and his troops shot our chickens to make their food. When my son went to stop them, they intimidated him with their guns, saying 'I will shot you if you come and interrupt again'. My son didn't dare to try and stop them again. They [troops] took 8 chickens. It cost us over 30,000 kyat. When we reported this to the village headman, he said, 'Don't come and talk about the troops – you're not the only one to face this kind of problem; almost all the villager have been facing this kind of problem. We have to follow what the troops say – if we don't follow what they command, they will beat and torturing us.' Because the village headman said this to me, I have nothing I can say to him about that anymore...As for me, I had to serve 5 times for [forced] portering while I stayed in this village. The military battalion also confiscated my farm. When I saw the soldiers killing my son's chicken, I was very sorry for my son. But, we can do nothing to take revenge on them [troops].

According to Nai Myit, a villager from Kywe Thone Nyima village, the army used travel restrictions as a guise to steal villager's crops and destroy their fields:

They [MNH forces] only allowed villagers to work on their farms or outside the village from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm. Because of ban on sleeping [on the farms] in the nighttime, most farmers have lost their crops. Mostly, the troops have been stealing the crops they were growing. Not only do they steal the farm products, but also destroy and uproot our fields. The troops say the reason for the ban is that they can just focuses on the villagers and not confuse them with the insurgent groups. Because our plantations are destroyed and our farm products are lost, we couldn't stay there anymore. That's the reason I left my village and came to find a job here [Northern Ye].

Similar incidents have been described in Khamayan village and Sanngantaw village. Villagers were accused by local troops of supporting the insurgent forces. As punishment SPDC forces collected punitive taxes and confiscated land belonging to villagers.

According to Nai Beh, a 50 year old villager from Sangantaw village, he had his family could no longer live under the punitive arbitrary taxation enacted by LIB No. 273 against the village for supporting insurgents, and moved. He explained, "In early June, I moved to live in Ye township where my relatives are located. I've heard the military has since confiscated my farm that is 3 acres wide and located in the Sangantaw areas."

Villager Agency:

This month HURFOM has focused part of its research on the topic of villager agency⁷. In particular, this research has hoped to provide a more full picture of villagers who suffer the systematic SPDC army abuses. Rather than focusing on villagers as helpless and passive recipients of abuse and rights violations, this research focus on documenting the acts of empowerment villagers practice, resisting the excesses of SPDC abuse occurring daily.

Within the spectrum of research for this report, several villagers were willing to describe their efforts to mitigate the abuses they faced at the hands of local battalions.

Nai Win, a 43 year-old Khamayan villager, describes his village's attempt to negotiate against a forced relocation, under the threat of death, with LIB No. 282:

In May, the SPDC Light Infantry Battalion No. 282 accused our villagers of supporting the rebel groups. They [troops] tried to move all the villagers to another place. We reasoned with the troops, saying that we grew up in that place, we don't want to move, and that we also haven't communicated with any of the rebel groups; However LIB No. 282 did not accept our claims....[and] gave us three days to move from the village. They also threatened us, that if we didn't move, they would kill us all. During the second week of May, village headman Nai Pan Nywe and his secretary Nai chit Thwe called all the villagers to attend a meeting and discuss the options for negotiating with the military battalion. Our entire village agreed to pay the troops 2,000,000 kyat to stop them from forcing the village to move. When we collected all the money, we went to give to the commander but the commander did not accept our money. We asked him to not move our village, after which he asked for 2,500,000 kyat so that he would ask permission from the higher position military officers. We all agreed to give him that amount of money. In my life, I have never had to pay that amount of money before. From poor families, the village collected 30,000 [kyat] and 50,000 [kyat] to 70,000 [kyat] from the rich families. As for our daily workers like me, they had to borrow money for the neighborhood and then pay them back slowly⁸.

Naing Soe Naing, a 29 year-old motorbike owner from Alaesakhan village, Yebyu Township, explains how he resisted efforts by SPDC soldiers to commandeer his motorbike:

The battalion has been collecting 5 motorbikes for soldiers to use traveling every day. For villagers who don't have a motorbike, they must pay 500 [kyat] for petrol. I had bought my motorbike and had it only one year, but now my motorbike license plate and chain cover are destroyed. Our villagers can't avoid the military. We don't have a choice – they forced us to pay. However, I had an idea - when my[bike] duty arrives I take out all my motorbike parts like I am trying to repair it. When they [village headman's secretary & soldiers] see my motorbike is being repaired they don't take my bike, they just ask for the 500 kyat. Giving money is better than my motorbike.

Conclusion:

The ongoing campaign by SPDC armed forces to destroy the KNLA and Mon insurgent groups, Rahmonya, Nai Chen Deng and Nai Khin Maung, has done incalculable economic and human damage to the region. As noted in numerous individual testimonies, villagers have been able to survive within the region, living in their home villages, for most of their lives. But trying to live under the rights violations, and abuse systemically practiced by the SPDC, becomes more impossible with every act perpetrated against villagers. For many, that point where a choice must be made between survival via displacement or assured destruction is quickly approaching.

⁷ See, *Village Agency* Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), November 2008 p. 7

HURFOM makes use of the definition of villager agency, loosely defined by KHRG as "village-level initiatives and villagers' capacity to resist abuse."

⁸ Despite successful efforts to save the village from relocation, Nai Win, a day laborer, ultimately had to leave due to the extreme costs of paying of the battalion commander to vouch for the village.

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:

HURFOM, P. O. Box 2237, General Post Office
Bangkok 10501, THAILAND
E-mail: hurfomcontact@yahoo.com
Website: <http://www.rehmonnya.org>

With regards,

Director
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

In being forced to arbitrarily pay taxes to both Burmese armed forces and insurgent groups, villagers have little if any opportunity to gain any financial stability. With money invested in the infrastructure of daily life, villagers can watch entire livelihoods vanish with the theft and seizure of farm animals and crops, or the destruction of a home or farm. Lacking infrastructure of employment, or means of making money, the SPDC is able to successfully displace villagers from their homes. Given the goal of SPDC forces – total control of the region – it is unlikely that Burmese army battalions will reign in their deliberate campaign of abuse against villagers, until insurgent groups have been driven from northern Yebyu and southern Ye Township.

However, as the final section of analysis in this report briefly demonstrates, villagers, despite the danger, are still active in determining their own fate. Fully aware of the threat from systematic targeting of their daily lives by Burmese army forces, villagers devise methods of survival, or relocate to safer, more quiet areas on their own terms. While overwhelming, these abuses must not be seen as completely unchallenged. Whether villagers remain or chose to depart from their homes, it is villagers actions of resistance and choice that demonstrate their continued role as active participants within the regions political structure.

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