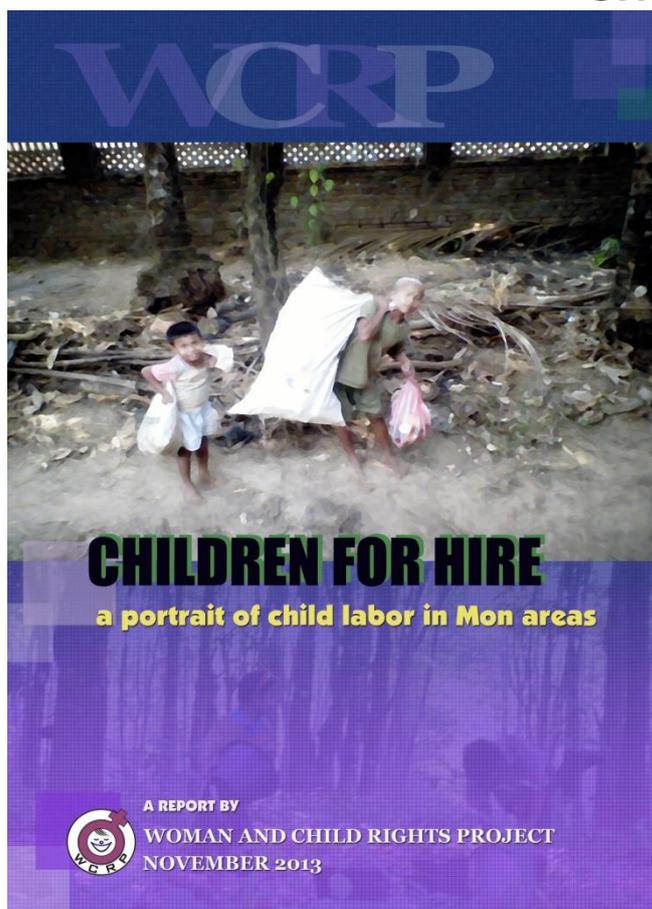


Volume 4, January 2014

WCRP releases “Children for Hire” to mark Universal Children’s Day



November 20, 2013

The Woman and Child Rights Project (WCRP) has released its report, “Children for Hire: A portrait of child labor in Mon areas,” to illustrate the incidence of child labor in rural Mon communities and along Burma’s eastern border. Drawn from 67 interviews conducted with working children and their families, health workers, public sector and civil society members, and child protection officers, the report aims to elevate the voices of underage workers and expose the less visible forms of child labor that exist outside of urban settings.

Interviews with children and parents revealed child labor to be symptomatic of cycles of poverty fueled by poor access to education and healthcare, landlessness, migration, and the effects of decades of armed conflict and human rights abuses. Children, and particularly young girls, were also subject to social and gender norms that contributed to their entry into the workforce. The reduced likelihood that working children will complete their education and the increased risks associated with labor performed during children’s early developmental stages were found to feed directly back in to this cycle.

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Publisher's Message

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uch of the world has been intoxicated by changes taking place in Burma in recent years. Sanctions are lifting, business people are scouting opportunities, and government promises of reform and freedom frequently capture global headlines. However, for many of the country's residents, these acclaimed transitions amount to little more than rumors. In some areas, it seems violations committed by the military or government is reducing, but new abuses may be taking their place, as the country rushes toward democratic and developmental goals.

While the government boasts about its transitions toward a free, democratic society, WCRP continues to receive reports of abuses against women and children. Human rights abuses are still systematically committed throughout Burma, in the form of ongoing militarized sexual violence and/or rape, violence against women and domestic violence, threats from human trafficking and exploitation due to the increasing number of brothels in local communities, increasing child labor and exploitation, gaps in access to healthcare and education, obstacles to adequate income, as well as direct threats to human rights activists.

Specifically, WCRP has found that the military continues to commit acts of sexual violence against women and children in the Mon areas. Further, the military threatens human rights workers, and works to prevent offending soldiers from being brought to justice for their crimes. Such actions have cultivated a culture of blatant impunity within the military, where soldiers are given a "license to rape", as SWAN highlighted in 2002, and WCRP highlighted in "Catwalk to the Barracks" in 2005; soldiers seem to believe they are entitled to a special policy to rape.

As WLB has reported that other ethnic women have faced similar abuses at the hands of the military, we, WCRP and WLB formally call for the immediate attention to these issues in the national and international political dialogue. It is crucial that current political discourse address past human rights violations, as well as the Burmese Army's role in such abuses. It is imperative that at the crux of this dialogue, it is accepted that, in a free country, the military is subject to civilian authorities representing the genuine will of the people. The ethnic people of Burma will not see an end to militarized sexual violence unless, and until, the military is placed under civilian control through constitutional amendments.

This moment in Burma's transition brings new challenges, as well as enduring difficulties, but it also provides an emerging space for women's participation and empowerment. Through communal hard work and dedication, women can be more confident than ever to engage in peace talks, political processes, community development initiatives, and civil society movements. The rapid pace of change must be met with equally swift action in peace, democratic representation, and development.

We ask that local, national, regional, and international communities answer the call to support women's capacity, and listen to women's voices.

Brutally Attacked by Burmese Soldier, Victim's Future is Uncertain

February 11, 2014

Mi Cho, 43, faces continuing hardship after having survived a brutal attack by Second Corporal Ye Lin Tun. Along with a serious head injury resulting from the assault, Mi Cho must undergo surgery for a finger injury; a surgery necessary for her to ever be able to work again. Effects of the attack have not only created serious health risks, but have left Mi Cho and her family destitute, as she tries to cover hospital costs and her family's living expenses..

In the early morning of January 26, 2014, Mi Cho was assaulted and beaten by Second Corporal Ye Min Tun, from Artillery Battalion No. 315, located west of Wae Ka Lee village, Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State. Mi Cho was attacked while she was collecting rubber liquid in the rubber plantation located near the Artillery Battalion, whereupon she sustained severe injuries to her eyes, face, chest, head, back, as well as a bite injury to her hand.

Still unable to straighten her head, Mi Cho will be continuing her recovery from the brutal assault at Kyi Myin Dain Orthopedic Hospital in Rangoon, where she will undergo surgery for serious finger injuries. The victim and her family are in a dire situation, as they cannot afford the operation; if they do not find support, Mi Cho will lose the function of her finger, rendering her unable to work to support her family, and leaving the future of her family's welfare uncertain.

On February 9th, Captain Nai Aung Tun, of Artillery Battalion No. 315, along with two of his soldiers, visited Mi Cho at Rangoon Hospital where they met with the chairman of the Mon Democratic Party. Mi Cho was not able to talk properly, due to injuries withstood during the attack; she will be transferred to Kyi Myin Dain Orthopedic Hospital in Rangoon, on Tuesday, February 11, 2014.

Although the hospital in Rangoon deemed her well enough to be discharged three days ago, Mi Cho is still experiencing faintness and vomiting; her family has asked her doctor to re-admit her until she is able to be transferred to Kyi Myin Dain Orthopedic Hospital.

The victim and her family are desperately seeking support for Mi Cho's hospitalization. As one of Mi Cho's relatives recounts, "Mi Cho's head [does not need surgery], but [it needs serious care], according to the doctor from Yangon hospital. However, her finger [needs] to have [an] operation". The relative continues, "It will take a long time for her to be discharged from the hospital. We can't assume how much [it] will [cost] for hospitalization. [The chairman of the] Mon Democratic Party is currently helping us; we [have] some support from [the] Mon community and [the] Women League Burma (WLB), [but] Mi Cho's family needs a lot of support [right] now".

This marks the second sexual assault by a Burmese soldier in Thanbyuzayat Township in just four and a half weeks, between December 24, 2013 and January 26, 2014. Ethnic women are experiencing systemic and widespread sexual assault at the hands of the Burmese military. Military authorities are actively working to suppress any news of Mi Cho's assault, as well as the numerous attacks like it.

NMSP and border groups discuss child protection in armed conflict

September 18, 2013



WCRP: Community-based organizations located in the Thai-Burma border town of Sangkhlaburi met with members of the New Mon State Party, the predominant ethnic Mon resistance group, to discuss becoming a signatory to Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment for the protection of children in armed conflict.

In the meeting held on September 9, Nai Bayar Chan Mon of the NMSP's Military Affairs Committee explained the Deed's 16 provisions and how his party plans to adhere to commitments that include protection of youth from sexual violence and cruel and inhumane treatment, a complete ban on the use of children in hostilities and the recruitment of child soldiers, and respect for international norms surrounding child rights. In addition, the NMSP agreed to provide shelter, food and education to children displaced by war and to allow Geneva Call to administer monitoring inspections in NMSP controlled areas.

The NMSP Guidance Committee, a liaison group headed by Joint Secretary 1 NaiAung Min, attended the event along with NaiSoe Mon and Nai

Ram from local border areas, Research and Strategy Officer Major NaiThiri Mon Chan, and NaiNyanTun who facilitated the discussions.

During the meeting's question and answer section the Coordinator of the Women and Child Rights Project, MiSauh Ta Jo, asked how the NMSP intended to work on child protection issues and how community-based groups could collaborate with the party to advance these goals. Joint Secretary 1 NaiAung Min responded that while the NMSP does not directly work on child rights as part of their routine activities, they encourage children not to participate in armed conflict and advocate against the recruitment of child soldiers by armed groups.

"We consider anyone under 18 to be a child. We in the NMSP respect and uphold child rights and must ensure development, education, and healthcare for children. Additionally, we should know that child labor is a violation of child rights. If you want to work for child protection in armed conflict with the NMSP I recommend you contact our military office directly."

Geneva Call, a humanitarian organization based in Geneva, Switzerland, established its "Deed of Commitment for the protection of children from the effects of armed conflicts" as part of their efforts to improve armed non-state actors' adherence to international humanitarian and human rights laws.

After becoming a signatory in August last year an NMSP committee met with Mr. Chris Rush, Geneva Call's Senior Programme Officer for Asia, on November 5 to negotiate the inclusion of child rights protections in Mon law. Members of the NMSP and its judiciary plan to jointly draft the amendments prior to the party's next big conference in 2015. ■

“Tuition” practices continue in Mon State



October 22, 2013

WCRP: Despite regulations placed on schoolteachers by the education department in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State, the fee-based, after-school tutoring sessions known as “tuition” allegedly continue to be offered to students. A common characteristic of the Burmese education system, tuition increases schooling’s cost burden on families and puts pressure on students who say their grades and exam scores would suffer without the extra instruction.

The Chief of Education reportedly handed down the most recent prohibition on tuition to principals in every school in Mon State on August 2. The ruling allegedly barred government schoolteachers from offering tuition and stipulated that they work together collaboratively in the schools and follow guidance given by principals.

“The rule that restricted tuition was already set in 2008. [Then in] August 2013 it was publicized again,” said a principal from Mudon Township. “The principals and teachers already signed contracts promising not to hold tuition. However, many teachers do not follow the rule.”

She continued by describing how conflict was being created in schools and communities because some teachers adhered to the ruling while others disregarded it. If teachers did not keep their promises to stop tuition, she said, democratic reform would not be encouraged at the local level.

However, teachers pointed to their low government salaries as creating strong incentives to supplement income with tuition fees. They also explained that any community member with a university degree could register with the local authorities to offer tuition, so even if teachers agreed not to provide the tutoring sessions, someone else would.

“If the government was able to pay [us] enough, there wouldn’t be any tuition conflicts. What’s more, if they had a rule to punish teachers who held tuition, no one would dare to do it,” said a primary school teacher.

Tuition has gained in notoriety over the years as a significant roadblock to universal education and one that unduly targets poorer families. Students who are unable to afford the extra classes or are busy helping with the family business outside regular school hours describe the discrimination they receive from teachers who allegedly favor their after-school, paying pupils. ■

Village welcomes Mon language instruction back to government school



October 21, 2013

WCRP:After two decades of Mon language instruction being barred from government classrooms, a combined primary and middle school in Yebyu Township's Yaphu village has received government go-ahead to once again teach their mother tongue. Villagers said they celebrated the decision but were disheartened that government funding for the language classes would reportedly not be released until 2014. Nonetheless, in a move to rally around the newly won consent, the community sought donations from the village administration, local residents, and the area's predominant ethnic resistance group, the New Mon State Party (NMSP), to immediately commence Mon language classes for primary schoolchildren.

Families of Yaphu's roughly 200 households were asked to contribute as much as they could, anywhere from 500 to 1,000 kyat, to secure a monthly salary of 50,000 kyat for an instructor. The collection drive succeeded, and in September residents hired a former monastic school Mon language teacher to instruct more than 100 children ranging from first to fifth grades. Villagers said the NMSP supplied the Mon language textbooks.

"I only have to teach one subject to all the students," said the recently appointed teacher. "It's not difficult to teach them and they learn fast because Mon is their mother language. They all seem interested. As a Mon teacher, I am so happy that Mon language was allowed in government schools. I will try my hardest to teach [the students] as best I can."

The instructor explained that she teaches Mon to first through third graders for 30 minutes each day and spends 45 minutes with the fourth and fifth graders. She said class often begins with a Mon language poem to engage the students and afterward they study the alphabet.

"I was very pleased that Mon language [instruction] was permitted in the government school," said one parent of a primary school student. "I also encouraged them to [offer] it; I think there's nothing better for the children. I thought the most effective way to learn Mon language was to learn it during summer school at the monastery [because in the past] Mon language was only taught at the monastery. I would like the [Mon language] teacher in the government school to teach well. The children's education depends on how the teachers teach."

According to locals, Mon language instruction in Yebyu Township's government schools has also been made available in nearby Kywe Ta Lin village, while Kadin and Lae Sa Khan villages are still petitioning for approval. ■

October 11, 2013

WCRP: Today marks the United Nation's annual "International Day of the Girl Child" with the theme "Innovating for Girls' Education." This year, the UN is highlighting the roles that technology and innovation in policies, partnerships, and resource utilization play in advancing girls' access to education, calling for "fresh and creative perspectives to propel girls' education forward."

UN Day of the Girl Child and eradicating the "black spot" of harassment



These types of inventive solutions to cultural and logistical barriers to girls' education are needed in Mon areas, particularly among the more rural and isolated communities along the Thai-Burma border. Many small villages have primary and middle schools, or monastic education centers, but students who want to continue on to secondary education, called 9 Standard and 10 Standard (informally called Grades 10 and 11), are not likely to have a local high school. Rural families are often required to fund daily transportation or shoulder the cost of a hostel so the students can live closer to the school.

"I completed Grade 9 at the Mon National Middle School in KhawZaw village in 2012," said a student from Pope Htaw village in an interview last July. "My parents can't afford for me to continue to Grade 10 because the Inn Din village [high] school in Ye

Township is very far away and the school costs are expensive. My parents are poor and work on a rubber plantation and they are not interested in supporting or encouraging my education. For these reasons, I have to stop my studies this year."

The distance between villages and high schools presents a particular challenge for girl students, namely found in the cultural aversion to allowing women to travel alone and the threat of harassment or sexual assault. Parents in rural areas reported not wanting their daughters to travel too early or late in the day and therefore often prevented girls from attending additional study sessions held in the mornings or after school. Many Mon community members agreed that parents are very strict with daughters, limiting their mobility as a means to keep them safe, whereas boys have fewer restrictions and are rarely taught

to change the very behavior that creates the risks for young women.

Some girls said they feel attending school is not always comfortable or safe for them once they reach ages of 13 or 14. The attention they start to receive from boy classmates, coupled with families' increased attention to their safety outside the home, is frequently interpreted as blame or some fault of the girls'. Interestingly, in community discussions about violence against women, boys reported that they consider comments they make to a girl about her appearance to merely be compliments that should encourage her. On the contrary, girls said the remarks about how they look incite feelings of shame and embarrassment because they believe no one would say anything unless they were doing something wrong to warrant it. To them, these comments serve as punishment for something that the community or culture deems incorrect.

While community members recognize these different experiences and parents

perceive the hazards faced by young women among their male peers, the strategies to address the issue largely center around further isolating girls. Some villages have chosen to build separate school buildings that are fully enclosed and away from the boys, while other communities simply do not tolerate young women walking alone. This serves to reinforce girls' sense that they are less capable than their male counterparts and creates justification for harassment should a young woman choose to go out without a companion. Rarely did people describe tactics that tackled the root of the problem: boys' behavior and cultural or gender norms that disadvantage girls. Parents may resort to keeping a daughter home from school unless she has a chaperone to walk with, or decide it is not safe for her to travel to a neighboring village to continue her education, but may never talk to sons about the damage that verbal and physical harassment does to women and their communities.

One woman from a populous village in Ye Township described an experience she had in primary school when she was 11 years old. Her peers in 2 Standard were younger, mostly 8 or 9 years old, but because of the 1988 uprising in Burma her family had moved and she was placed below her age group at the new school. She said the difference in age did not bother her, in fact, she explained that she was very active in school and a leader among her classmates.

"It was the end of Buddhist Lent and there were many celebrations in the village, with shows and movies being shown in different homes. I was at a neighbor's house with friends when the electricity went out, and someone behind me jumped up and put his arms around my neck and chest. At first I thought it was my friend but then I started shouting because I didn't know who it was. Later, at school, a boy started following me around and one day he said something about being the one that touched me in the dark. I felt so much shame and didn't want to tell anyone about what happened, and for six months I became shy and quiet at school, not at all like I was before. I felt a black spot was on me because of what happened."

Notably, residents of several communities near the Thai-Burma border reported that their schools consisted of more girl students than boys due to the enormous impact that labor migration has had on the area. Boys as young as 11 or 12 supplement the family income by moving to Thailand or Malaysia to work on rubber plantations or in factories, often leaving their villages with more female than male inhabitants. However, while girls may be well represented in primary and secondary school classrooms, they allegedly face unequal conditions when applying for university degrees.

One graduate of the Rangoon Institute of Economics said, "There are different exam score requirements for girls and

boys to get into university degree programs throughout Burma. When I took the 10 Standard Exam, I wanted to study agriculture and knew I needed a score of 350 to apply. Boys only had to score 340 to study agriculture. I scored a 345 and was unable to apply, so I studied economics instead because it required a 250."

The young woman said the different score requirements hold true for most other academic programs as well, including medicine, engineering, IT, forestry, and English. Some former students said these lopsided qualifications help even the playing field since more girls appear to be finishing high school than boys, but others insisted that many jobs, particularly related to sciences and technology, were considered culturally unfit for women and the disadvantage was designed to keep them out of the traditional male sphere.

While an overarching issue in Burma remains the education system that fails to cultivate critical thinking or lead to meaningful careers among the country's girls and boys alike, young women are not yet able to fully access or utilize education equivalently to their male counterparts. Improving educational outcomes for the country's population must include innovations to school curriculums that integrate positive lessons about gender norms and encourage families to root out the source of discrimination against the girl child. ■

Universal Children's Day commemorated on Thai-Burma border



November 27, 2013

WCRP: Nearly 1,000 children and community members living near the Thai-Burma border joined events last weekend to commemorate Universal Children's Day on November 20. Families from Bleh Don Phite and Palain Japan villages in New Mon State Party (NMSP)-administered areas participated in the festivities, with activities also organized in the Karen village of HteeWa Doe. On the Burma side of the border town of Three Pagodas Pass, over 500 students, teachers, monks, and local residents attended celebrations held at the Dama Hay Won Karen School.

Organizers gave speeches highlighting child rights and protection responsibilities along with risks associated with the widespread trade in drugs along the border. The Border Health Initiative (BHI) and other ethnic Mon community groups coordinated the events in concert with the NMSP, the predominant ethnic Mon resistance group. Staff from BHI, an organization based in Sangkhlaburi, Thailand, that provides health services in hard-to-reach areas inside Burma's eastern border, reported that parents and teachers successfully helped oversee the day's activities.

"We served milk to the children in the early morning and [later] provided lunch," said BHI Director MiSeikKamar. "The events included different games like football, sprinting, painting, poem readings, and answering trivia questions about basic healthcare knowledge and child rights. The children seemed very happy with the activities."

Mon community-based organizations started to observe Universal Children's Day in NMSP-controlled areas near Halockhani camp for internally displaced people in 2006 and Bananbane in 2012.

"I got a chance to compete in running, jumping, sack races, and football. Our group won an award so we were all so happy. I hope the other children were happy, too. I would like for this kind of event to be held again next year," said 10-year-old Mehm Chan who attended the festivities at Palain Japan.

In observance of Universal Children's Day, the Woman and Child Rights Project (WCRP) also released its report, "Children for Hire: A portrait of child labor in Mon areas," to illustrate the incidence of child labor in rural Mon communities and along Burma's border with Thailand. ■

Rise in bars and brothels in Ohn Pin Kwin



October 25, 2013

WCRP:The large village of Ohn Pin Kwin in southern Burma lies along a gas pipeline that is longer, but less well known, than the controversial Yadana pipeline it connects to. During its construction over 2,400 acres of land were seized between Kanbawk in Tenasserim Region and MyaingKalay in Karen State, and for which villagers received little to no compensation.

Today Ohn Pin Kwin is home predominantly to ethnic Tavoy people together with a small Mon population. The more than 500 families rely mainly on manual labor in factories, cultivation on farms and plantations, or migratory work in Thailand for their livelihoods. But residents alleged that the relative calm in the village has been disrupted by a wave of “beer shops,” or bars, that have recently opened and encouraged increased drinking, prostitution, and corruption between bar owners and police to allow commercial sex. According to villagers, there are now five locales serving alcohol in Ohn Pin Kwin, one run by ethnic Mon proprietors and the others by Burmese, and a spike in family disputes and domestic violence has accompanied the rising number of bars and brothels.

“This village was peaceful before. But most people are accustomed to drinking now, even 60-year-old men go to the beer shop. There was nothing like that before,” said one local mother. “So many parents worry about their sons becoming alcoholics or developing bad habits if the beer shops continue to exist.”

In one case, bar owner KoTharNge was accused of bribing Kanbawk area police to permit prostitution in his shop. Residents reported that he coerced 15 young women from Rangoon, ranging in age from 18 to 25, by promising them jobs working as vendors or housekeepers in the village. One of the women described how 50-year-old KoTharNge paid her parents a lump sum up front to get their permission for her to leave, but said now the women each receive 30,000 kyat per month for preparing food during the day and working as prostitutes after 11pm. She said the small salary has to cover all their food costs and that they are often scolded, concluding that many of the young women would leave if they could find other jobs. ■

Beer, brothels, and bribery in Myaintayar quarter

November 4, 2013

HURFOM: Almost three decades ago the capital city of Moulmein in Mon State was divided into quarters, with one, Myaintayar, designated as a residential area solely for civil servants and military families. But over the years, political promotions moved government employees to other parts of the country and Cyclone Nargis brought a swell of internal migration to the city, resulting in a more diverse population that expanded neighborhoods and filled vacated homes. Today, Myaintayar quarter is a mix of urbanite shopkeepers and hotel owners, laborers working in Mon State's large industrial and agricultural sectors, NGO personnel and office representatives of various armed ethnic groups, and a sizable community of students and staff from nearby Mawlamyine University.

Residents reported that in the past few years, this spiraling growth has also included a surge in alcohol sales and prostitution. According to official records, there are now 132 bars, massage parlors, and brothels in Myaintayar. Local people alleged that the proliferation of these shops is attributable to a network of bribes paid by business owners to the "quarter-in-charge" police, who work under the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the special intelligence police who were granted authority by the state government to manage the quarter. Reports highlighted that members of these two groups, headed by KoKyawKywi at the intelligence police and Kyaw Min Tun serving as the "quarter-in-charge" administrator, bring in around 200,000 to 300,000 kyat per month in kickbacks.

Interviews with Myaintayar residents revealed a number of concerns about the businesses' effects on young people's lives and the persistence of local-level corruption despite Burma's reform process. Some parents said they had approached community authorities to register their dissatisfaction, but had seen little change.

Daw Yin May, 58, is the wife of a retired civil servant. She said, "There are around eight prostitution and massage bars in our area, and I see some young people using drugs almost every day and night. I worry for my children because I do not want them to get involved in this, so I prevent my children from going to [those places] and I'm thinking of moving away. This section is not safe like before when only government employees lived here."

A group of seven residents asserted that the bars were being opened particularly in Myaintayar quarter because of its large, young population and its location somewhat outside of the city, about a 15 minute drive from downtown Moulmein. The residents explained that the illicit businesses could "hide" among the many residential family dwellings to avoid government scrutiny. >> From page



“The Myaintayar section was only for civil servants and military families, but now many migrating families live there,” said a 42-year-old Mawlamyine University professor. “Both local people and university students live in the Myaintayar section, but there are some added dangers for the students since the illegal bars are close to the university. It is unethical to run those kinds of illegal and immoral bars around the university because it seems the businesses are targeting the many young students who have money to spend on their schooling. The local authorities should consider the consequences of these bars for local people and not only think of the bribes they receive.”

A member of an armed ethnic group (with a ceasefire agreement) who lives in Myaintayar said, “We heard that some of the businesses also sell drugs, and abuses will increase if the number of bars keeps increasing. Last week, a house opposite ours had some things stolen, and some vandal drove by making loud motorbike noises at midnight. It was not like this in the past. The quarter police and special intelligence police profit a million kyat per month and share the earnings with all their [associated] groups like police officers and state and region administrators. Since they ignore the damage done to the locals it seems like they don’t care about local people. The ceasefire group can advocate [for awareness about] the problem but only the government can solve it.”

A local from Myaintayar said, “Unfortunately, some armed ethnic groups [that signed ceasefires] also run one of the [Myaintayar] bars that was permitted to open after paying bribes to the government. They named it Su Baung massage bar.”

Residents said some of the massage bars are legitimate businesses and not fronts for commercial sex, but one young member of a community development and social welfare organization described the growing size of the informal economy that hinges on peddling alcohol and prostitution. “There are 15 women estimated to work in each bar, so around 1,500 women workers depend on [income from] prostitution and the massage bars in Myaintayar. There are also [around] four attendants who coordinate the women workers for the customers in a bar, so there are roughly 500 attendants in the 132 bars.”

Local taxi driver KoHtwe, 29, said, “If I don’t get any customers during the daytime, I usually park my taxi in front of the bars at night. Sometimes I get lucky and meet people from [out of town] who don’t know how to get to the bars, and I make 1,000 kyat to transport them. I can make 2,500 kyat if a customer calls for a prostitute [and she needs] to go to a hotel or some other place. For me, I do not criticize [the women] much because I am a taxi driver and I work on the agreement that if they want to go someplace, then I send them. I see it just as us working.”

However, many residents asserted that local authorities should stop being influenced by bribes and weigh the long-term social implications of the quarter’s changing image. Interviewees alleged that the rule of law does not extend to the police, complicit members of armed ethnic groups, or local government authorities, who appear to be ignoring the widespread corruption.

“The fact that having money means people can do whatever they want has been the case in Burma for a long time. We submit letters to state authorities and they address the issues somewhat, but [the misconduct] will happen again because they also profit from the [unlawful] businesses. So if we want change in Burma, we have to change everything,” said KoHtain Win, a member of a community welfare group. ■

January 9, 2014

On the evening of December 24, 2013, thirteen year old MiParoal Mon was alone at her home in KyoneKanya village in KhawZar Sub-Township, when she was abducted and raped by local soldier Thein Win, of Infantry Battalion No. 31 (IB No. 31), based in KhawZar Sub-Township, Ye Township, Mon State. Attempts to bring charges against her assailant were continually thwarted as various military personnel continually threatened, and eventually forced MiParoal Mon to sign a contract to conceal the fact that the assault ever took place. As Burma is working to create a more safe and transparent public space for its' citizens, such inaction and blatant impunity perpetrated by the military will hinder any hope they have of building trust between the army and the country's ethnic minority populations.

Earlier in the month, a commanding officer from IB No. 31 commissioned the victim's parents, NaiPha Dot and MiKyin Wine, to construct a thatched-roof for a local military building. On the night of the attack, a neighbor witnessed Thein Win, and three other men, come to the NaiPha Dot and MiKyin Wine family home under the guise of collecting materials for the roof construction.

Rape of local girl at the hands of Infantry Battalion No. 31

It is reported that at 7:00pm on December 24th, MiParoal Mon was alone at her home when she was hugged tightly from behind. Thein Win and his accomplices bound the girl's hands together, and abducted her from the home. The four men brought MiParoal Mon to the nearby Mon National School, where Thein Win proceeded to rape her.

During the investigative process, MiParoal Mon described in detail the events of the attack. According to one KyoneKanya resident who attended the investigation process, "[On the] night of the incident, MiParoal Mon was making a roof while her parents were [out]. To carry the nypa palm, Thein Win and his three men went down to MiParoal Mon's house around 7:00pm. The incident occurred that night. Thein Win intruded the house and hugged her tightly. Then they brought her to the Mon National School and assaulted her there. The men had rope and tied her up. Only Thein Win raped her while three men helped him to finish his desire".

Visibly crying, MiParoal Mon ran home from the school. By this time NaiPha Dot and MiKyin Wine had returned to their home. As soon as they learned of the incident, NaiPha Dot and MiKyin Wine went to meet with their village administrator, NaiTunKyin, to press charges against the four men. NaiTunKyin, NaiPha Dot, MiKyin Wine, and other village members went to the IB No. 31 base. Upon learning the facts of the case, the base captain and other representatives from the military base, urged that the victim refrain from pressing charges. They offered MiParoal Mon a settlement of 500,000 kyat compensation, contingent upon MiParoal Mon signing an agreement to conceal the case. If she were to refuse this settlement, the military personnel threatened that MiParoal Mon and her family would be expelled from living in the village.

MiParoal Mon refused this settlement, and personally requested that her parents not accept anything the military would offer to settle the case easily. The military threatened the victim and her family to leave the

August 5, 2013

WCRP: As a week of heavy downpours and severe flooding that displaced thousands of people in southeastern Burma concludes, a number of news outlets continue to cover the scale of the crisis and the related humanitarian responses. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 33,409 people in Karen State have been displaced due to flooding, while Agence France-Press reported on August 2 that 4,700 people in neighboring Mon State were temporarily without homes. But much of the media coverage and relief assistance has not penetrated the smaller, remote, and more inaccessible border communities also inundated by rain, and only now are reports from these less publicized areas beginning to seep out.

Border communities struggle as monsoon floodwaters rise and recede



Chaung Zone village, located near the bustling border town of Three Pagodas Pass, is an example of just such an underreported area. Approximately 90 out of the village's 100 households have allegedly flooded since torrential rains began on July 30, the same day that residents said two children and their mother succumbed to swiftly rising water in their home. Villagers claimed that the water level reached the roofs of some houses and that several people were forced to seek shelter in a local school. Shop owners reported losing perishable items like rice, salt, and sugar to the inundation, further damaging local livelihoods and placing additional strain on already limited resources.

"There are 90 households in Chaung Zone village, 15 in PhaungSait, and 36 in Thabarwavillage that flooded," said an assistant to the village headman in ChaungZone. "The water rose at night and people had a hard time running away. Some people live on the other side of the [Zami] river and could not get back to their families [after work]. We've never seen the water come up like this before."

A woman from PhaungSait village said, "Water comes suddenly and people can't move their things fast enough. I have two children, one is in grade 11 and studies in Kyainnseiky in Karen state. The youngest one is in grade 6 in Chaung Zone. [The rain] made it really hard [for them] to travel between the village and school. Now the school is closed and they don't have to go, but even when it opens I won't allow them to go because it is too dangerous."

Women's Activities

Although the heavy rains have abated for the time being in Mon State, residents that fled their homes expressed hesitancy to return in case of renewed flooding. Those that remained in their villages eagerly await assistance that will provide much needed food supplies, temporary shelter, and clothing. Members of the Union Solidarity and Development Party, the National League for Democracy, and local community-based organizations in Three Pagodas Pass have reportedly collected and distributed donations of clothes, rice, and dry goods, but residents said the help has come slowly and many people continue to struggle to meet their most basic needs. ■

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“As a Mon community-based organization, it was important to see and verify that there are significant amounts of child labor in Mon areas,” said MiSautajo, the Project Manager for WCRP. “We found that many of our children are trapped in struggles with poverty and hard labor. Children are not accessing their fundamental rights like adequate food, basic healthcare, and education that were granted to them when the Burmese government ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991. Although there are some services helping poor and migrant children, there are still not enough activities when compared against the amount of child labor we have.”

Data collection found particular prevalence of child labor in agricultural practices, namely on rubber plantations and betel nut farms, as well as in furniture factories and small restaurants or shops. Children were also engaged as day laborers, piecing together daily wages by clearing weeds on plantations, collecting plastic recyclables to redeem, and working as cowhands or woodcutters.

“If I didn’t work one day, I wouldn’t eat that day, so there are no holidays for me,” said one 11-year-old boy interviewed for the report who works in a factory near the Thai-Burma border. “I have to work because my family would not have enough food without my income. I would like to join school like the other children. I want to play like them.”

Since 2000 WCRP has promoted and protected the rights of women and children in Mon areas and the southern part of Burma in accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). WCRP believes that through documentation, advocacy, capacity building, campaigning, community training, workshops, and education, change can be realized. ■

“We always appreciate feedback from our readers. Please feel free to contact our mailing or email address.”

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