

# 13. Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation

## 13.1 Background

In recognition of the plight of those displaced within the boundaries of their own countries, the international community has attempted to develop relevant protection mechanisms. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) covered under such mechanisms are defined by Article 2 of the 1998 United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as:

*“persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.”*

In principle, restrictions on forced displacement were first established as international norms under the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 12 of the UDHR protects against arbitrary interference or attacks on the home, while Article 25(1) also accords the right to housing. These protections were reiterated in the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Article 12(1) and 17(1) of ICCPR state respectively that: *“Everyone lawfully within the territory of a State shall, within that territory, have the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence;”* and that *“No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation.”* Similarly, Article 11(1) of ICESCR recognizes *“the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.”*

The rights of IDPs were most explicitly stated in the 1998 United Nations Guiding Principles on Forced Displacement. Though not a legally binding document, the Guiding Principles elucidated the rights of IDPs from existing international humanitarian and human rights law. According to Principle 5, States’ authorities *“shall respect and ensure respect for their obligations under international law, including human rights and humanitarian law, in all circumstances, so as to prevent and avoid conditions that might lead to displacement of persons.”* Furthermore when displacement does occur, Principle 5 dictates that States *“have the primary duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons within their jurisdiction.”* Enforced prohibitions against the forced displacement of persons and adequate provisions for their protection when such displacement does occur are necessary requisites for the fulfilment of the legal requirement of international human rights instruments.

Despite the large number of international instruments that have been drafted to protect individuals from displacement and subsequent protection should displacement occur, Burma has to date signed only the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). These two international

legal instruments, however, require that the authorities in Burma take appropriate measures to ensure women and children have access to adequate housing under Article 14(2)(h) and 27(3) respectively.

Furthermore, Article 17 of the 1977 Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Additional Protocol II), states that:

- “1. The displacement of the civilian population shall not be ordered for reasons related to the conflict unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand. Should such displacements have to be carried out, all possible measures shall be taken in order that the civilian population may be received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition.*
- 2. Civilians shall not be compelled to leave their own territory for reasons connected with the conflict.”*

Although Burma has neither ratified nor signed Additional Protocol II, the principles contained therein are now regarded as customary international law, thus making it binding on all States and non-state actors regardless of whether they have ratified the document or not.<sup>1</sup>

Nationwide figures on Burma's IDP population have not been compiled, although the most widely accepted estimate places the number somewhere around one million. Assuming that this estimate is accurate, and according to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), approximately half of this number resides in eastern Burma along the border with Thailand.<sup>2</sup> Though no comprehensive studies exist which examine displacement across the country, it is highly likely that the highest rates of internal displacement occur in ethnic minority areas. These are the areas typically experiencing continuing armed conflict and it is also within these areas that the SPDC pursues its brutal 'counter-insurgency' program that targets civilians to ostensibly undermine armed resistance groups. Abuses such as forced labour, extortion, extrajudicial execution, torture, forced relocation and other such human rights abuses that lead to internal displacement are the most prevalent in ethnic border areas.

For areas where reliable data exists, the TBBC recorded approximately 500,000 IDPs across Shan, Karenni, Karen and Mon States as well as in Tenasserim Division. However, this estimate, as acknowledged by TBBC is conservative and may well be considerably higher.

Deliberate policies which lead to forced displacement, whether through urban relocation programs, national development projects or ostensible 'counter insurgency' campaigns, testify to the junta's disregard for its internationally mandated "*responsibility to protect*" And illuminate the high humanitarian cost of sustained military rule. Furthermore, the distinct lack of SPDC assistance provided to IDPs obstructs the development of sustainable livelihoods for those who are displaced.

## 13.2 Causes of Displacement in Burma

In the vast majority of cases, the root causes of internal displacement in Burma can be traced back to the SPDC. The regime's relentless attempts to broaden and strengthen its stranglehold over the whole country, its peoples and resources has created conditions under which survival has become exceedingly difficult. When those conditions become too desperate, displacement typically ensues. Moreover, the SPDC continues to employ specific policies designed to cause such difficulties for local communities through the perpetration of gross violations of human rights and state-sponsored violence. Other leading causes of displacement find their origins in the regime's erroneous economic strategies and short-sighted development projects. Furthermore, ongoing armed conflict across the country and the extensive use of landmines in areas inhabited by civilians has also spawned thousands of displacees.

### Conflict-Induced Displacement

Ethnic armed conflict has been waged incessantly in Burma for the better part of the past 60 years. Violent conflict between armed resistance groups and the SPDC or any of their allied 'ceasefire groups' has caused high levels of displacement across the country. The ever-increasing expansion in both size and range of the SPDC army, coupled with a corresponding waning of those armed groups which continue to oppose the regime has resulted in military expansionism on a massive scale. Few areas remain that do not come under direct military control. Meanwhile disregard by the SPDC for the humanitarian fallout leaves villagers living in conflict zones in a highly insecure situation.

In April 2006, the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) pointed out how many media reports referred to IDPs in eastern Burma as "*fleeing fighting*". They also used the example of where one Reuters report "*labelled all of the villages being burned as 'ethnic rebel villages'*". KHRG argued that while these statements may be true in some cases, for the majority, neither of them were true, stating that most of the attacks were mounted against unarmed civilian villages: "*The attacks are unprovoked, and the villages are seldom defended by resistance forces; in fact, the SPDC troops prefer to avoid KNLA forces when possible and attack undefended villages*".<sup>3</sup>

The term conflict-induced displacement can thus often be misleading, in that one automatically forms a mental image of conflict in a traditional sense and assumes that civilians with no active role in the fighting are being displaced when the conflict waged between two opposing armies spills over into their homes. However, this is typically not the case in Burma where the conflict is a low intensity war of attrition primarily targeting civilians, where displacement of civilian villagers is not a side effect of the conflict, but rather the intended outcome. Most skirmishes between the junta and resistance forces occur when the latter attempts to protect civilian villagers from attacks by SPDC army units to give them the chance to flee. In such cases, the villagers are not fleeing fighting between the SPDC and the resistance group, but rather it is that fighting which is giving them the opportunity to do so.

For the majority of cases of displacement in areas experiencing armed conflict, the term conflict-induced displacement fails to sum up the reasons behind the displacement, and for

the purposes of this report, many of these have been categorized as human rights-induced displacement (see below).

That said, there were still a number of clashes reported during 2006 between SPDC army forces and resistance groups which resulted in the displacement of local populations. To cite but one example, on 20 March 2006, SPDC forces operating under Military Operations Command (MOC) #10 attacked Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Battalion #9 headquarters in Nyaunglebin District, Karen State. Approximately 400 villagers living in the area fled ahead of the approaching SPDC army columns.<sup>4</sup>

## Landmines

While many observers consider the use of landmines to be a facet of conflict-induced displacement (described above), categorising it as such risks oversimplifying the issue. Landmines represent a major obstacle for the internally displaced, particularly in ethnic minority areas experiencing armed conflict. Not only do they force villagers to flee from areas where they have been laid, but when they are deployed in and around villages, in fields and plantations, and on paths used by villagers, they prevent the safe return of the internally displaced. Mines, once laid, can remain a threat for many years and contribute to long-term displacement in the areas where they are used.

In northern Karen State, where the SPDC military offensive continued throughout the year, antipersonnel landmines were deployed on a massive scale. In March 2006, the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) reported that the SPDC was in the process of planting 2,000 landmines in Toungoo District alone, with the deliberate intent of restricting villagers' movements. Many of these mines were laid in an extensive north-south line bisecting the district along the point where the western plains gave way to the steep forested hills to the east. The pattern seen in the deployment of these mines suggested that the SPDC was going to great lengths to cut all lines of communication between villagers living in the SPDC-controlled plains and those living in areas beyond SPDC-control in the hills.<sup>5</sup> The deployment of landmines along this north-south axis continued beyond the boundaries of Toungoo District and into adjacent Nyaunglebin District where the same pattern was observed. In addition, landmines were reported as having been laid by SPDC army patrols in just about every location where they arrived.

Furthermore, various groups have documented dozens of cases of SPDC army soldiers and their allied ceasefire armies alike, deploying antipersonnel landmines in civilian villages to deter those villagers from returning to resettle in their homes once the soldiers have moved on. This makes it extremely difficult for villagers to survive in the forest, as many do not dare return to their villages even if only to gather what can be salvaged from their homes. There have been repeated incidents of villagers losing their lives or limbs to landmines planted right in front of the door leading into their homes or beside items that the SPDC suspects the villagers will return for.<sup>6</sup> As a result, many villagers will only return to their village after KNLA soldiers have swept it for mines. However, in December 2006, FBR reported an incident in which SPDC army soldiers had planted a mine next to a fireplace inside the kitchen of a civilian home in Baw Kway Day village in Nyaunglebin District in western Karen State. The villagers had returned to the village with a KNLA escort who had checked the area for mines. The mine was triggered by one of the soldiers and the subsequent blast killed three and injured an additional eight.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, landmines have been laid in their hundreds (if not thousands) in villagers' fields and plantations, beside streams where they fish and collect water and on the pathways they use.<sup>8</sup> In each of these cases, the presence of landmines makes villagers' lives both difficult and dangerous, and ultimately, many villagers will flee an area known to suffer heavy landmine contamination. (For more information, see Chapter 16: Landmines).

## Development-Induced Displacement

If one were to listen to the SPDC's propaganda you could be led to believe that the regime is in fact creating a "*modern developed nation*" and bringing positive change to the country's social and economic development. What the propaganda fails to state is that this is being done to the detriment of local populations.

Poverty remains widespread across the country, yet continues to be most acute in ethnic minority areas.<sup>9</sup> Within these areas, the junta's Border Areas Development Program, which as is suggested by its name, is supposed to improve conditions for local communities. However, by focusing on the development of infrastructure, the Border Areas Development Program has had little impact in alleviating poverty in ethnic minority areas.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, some groups have argued that all such infrastructure development projects have not only "*undermined livelihoods*", but have also served to bolster continued military rule.<sup>11</sup>

Development projects that contributed to internal displacement in Burma during 2006 include the construction of infrastructure, military bases, 'model villages' and agricultural development projects. (For more information, see Chapter 5: Deprivation of Livelihood). Furthermore, the extractive industry has also played a role with many villages being either forcibly relocated away from mine sites or by being driven away by the resultant human rights abuses. Similarly, numerous hydroelectric projects under development in various parts of the country have also caused high levels of displacement.<sup>12</sup>

## Human Rights-Induced Displacement

The systematic and widespread violation of human rights is arguably one of the largest causes of displacement in Burma today. While many reports throughout 2006 referred to "*civilians fleeing fighting*", the reality remains that conflict in Burma is typically of a low intensity and what civilians are in fact fleeing from are the human rights abuses that invariably accompany increased militarization. Nowhere is this more prevalent than in areas of ethnic conflict. Furthermore, statements to this effect give the misleading impression that the villagers are fleeing from counter-insurgency measures taken by the SPDC against armed opposition groups and that the nature of the conflict has caused the violence to spill over into civilian villages, where the inhabitants caught up in a conflict they have no part in are labelled as "*collateral damage*".<sup>13</sup> However, the "*fighting*" that villagers are fleeing from has not been between two opposing armed forces, but rather direct and deliberate attacks on unarmed civilian villages. The villagers therefore, cannot be considered "*collateral damage*" in these attacks, but rather the intended targets of them.

In areas of ethnic conflict, the SPDC has continued to employ its Four Cuts Policy as a means to not only undermine resistance forces, but also subjugate local populations with the ultimate aim of bringing the entire country under direct military control.<sup>14</sup> Following the logic of the SPDC, all ethnic minorities are potential, if not actual insurgents. This is the central principle upon which the Four Cuts Policy is based. All villagers in areas of ethnic conflict are

perceived as supporting resistance forces. Therefore, the Four Cuts are a way of alienating resistance groups from their supposed civilian support base by cutting the flow of food, funds, recruits and intelligence.

The way in which the SPDC has attempted to achieve this has been to forcibly relocate entire villages from areas where resistance forces operate. Then, once interned in an SPDC-controlled relocation site, the villagers are kept on the brink of starvation through an extensive system of extortion and demands for food, labour and other goods. Furthermore, the villagers' freedoms of movement are also strictly regimented; in some cases stripped entirely. This is done ostensibly to impoverish the villagers to such a point that they cannot provide material support to resistance forces even if they should want to. Ultimately, when the demands become too great and food too scarce, many villagers flee from relocation sites to live as IDPs in the forest.

Those living beyond SPDC-control as IDPs do not have to contend with forced labour or extortion, but must flee ahead of any advancing SPDC army units. If seen by SPDC army patrols, IDPs are often fired upon. By refusing to comply with SPDC demands and living beyond their control, IDPs in conflict areas are thus considered as enemies of the state which must be either rounded up and relocated to state-controlled relocation sites, or simply shot on sight. SPDC army patrols also systematically destroy any hidden settlements in the forests where IDPs have been living as well as any food supplies or crops that they discover in an attempt to starve them out of the hills.

Under the Four Cuts Policy, abuses such as arbitrary arrest, forced relocation, extortion, forced labour, torture, rape and extrajudicial execution are not only common but are committed with impunity, and it are from these abuses that villagers flee. However, it must be noted that these abuses are not only perpetrated in areas experiencing conflict, but also in 'ceasefire areas' and other areas not undergoing armed struggle.



A group of over 100 Karen IDPs from southeastern Tantabin Township, Toungoo District slowly making their way towards the Thai-Burma border in March 2006 after spending several months in the forest. The villagers, originally from Klay Kee, Bu Kee, Hee Daw Khaw, Tha Aye Kee, Kho Kee, and Yuh Koh Thoo villages were all rendered homeless when SPDC army soldiers attacked and destroyed their villages in November 2005. *[Photo: KHRG]*

### 13.3 Destinations of the Displaced and Forcibly Relocated

Internal displacement in Burma has left civilians who find themselves in this predicament faced with various different options. Some have sought refuge in neighbouring countries where conditions are perceivably better (For more information, see Chapter 14: Situation of Refugees). Others have moved to nearby villages or urban areas where they hope to begin new lives. However, the majority, particularly for those in ethnic minority areas, find themselves forced either into an SPDC-controlled relocation sites, into the forest where they must live nomadically in IDP hiding sites trying to evade SPDC patrols, or into areas administered by SPDC-allied ceasefire groups. None of these situations are particularly appealing and each of them is fraught with its own set of unique difficulties.

#### Relocation Sites

Central to the policy employed by the regime in ethnic border areas is the SPDC's forced relocation campaign. In areas suffering from ethnic conflict, territory may be divided into three coloured zones: 'black' areas that are controlled by resistance forces; 'brown' contested areas; and 'white' areas where all traces of armed resistance have been eliminated. The SPDC army's primary objective is to rid the country of all black and brown areas where resistance groups operate by turning them all into white areas wholly controlled by the SPDC. In areas occupied by resistance groups, any village that is located in an area beyond direct military control is often forcibly relocated into areas that are controlled by the SPDC. Such 'relocation sites' are typically located along road corridors, adjacent to existing SPDC army camps so that the soldiers can regiment the freedoms of the villagers interned there, monitor their movements and exploit them as forced labour to porter military supplies along those roadways. Villages are typically only given a week, or in many cases even less, to dismantle their homes, gather all of their belongings and move all that they can to the relocation site. Villagers who remain behind after the appointed time has elapsed can be shot-on-sight. Upon arriving at the site, villagers are not provided with anything by the SPDC. They are generally assigned a small plot of land on which they must construct their home. Villagers must even provide their own building materials as the SPDC does not provide these either. It has been reported in some cases SPDC army soldiers have instructed villagers specifically not to take their belongings with them; that they will have the opportunity to return to collect their belongings later. However, as soon as the villagers have left, the soldiers have returned to the village and looted everything of value and eaten their fill of whatever food was left behind while the villagers are denied permission to ever return to their village to salvage what remained.<sup>15</sup> To ensure that the villagers do not attempt to secretly return to their homes, the soldiers often litter relocated villages with landmines or simply burn the whole site to the ground. (For more information, see Chapter 16: Landmines).

Most relocation sites are grossly overcrowded, lack any existing sanitation facilities, are typically located "*on barren land*" that does not lend itself well to agriculture, and often have poor access to fresh drinking water.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, being as overcrowded as many relocation sites are, all available arable land in the region is already under cultivation, and the new arrivals, denied the right to return to their villages or fields struggle to acquire enough food for their families. As such, SPDC-controlled relocation sites fail to meet the minimum requirements for villagers to establish and sustain a livelihood.

Once interned in a relocation site, villagers are seldom granted permission to leave to tend to crops, travel to markets in neighbouring villages or visit friends and relatives. SPDC authorities have ordered the residents of many relocation sites to fence the entire site, leaving only one or two gates allowing access or egress. These gates are overseen by SPDC army soldiers and the names of everyone entering or exiting the site is recorded. For most relocation sites, the only way that a villager is allowed to travel outside is when he/she is in possession of an SPDC-issued travel permit; obtained only after payment of a fee. While some travel passes authorize travel of up to one week, many only permit villagers to be away from the relocation site during the hours of daylight, typically between 6:00 am and 6:00 pm. However, possession of a valid travel permit does not guarantee safe passage. For example, Rohingya villagers in Buthidaung Township of Arakan State are regularly apprehended by SPDC authorities who destroy their travel passes and accuse them of travelling without proper documentation so that they can extort money from them.<sup>17</sup> In areas of ethnic conflict, villagers found travelling outside the relocation site are often accused of having been in contact with resistance forces and are often fired upon on-sight without so much as even checking their documentation.<sup>18</sup>



A photo of the Plaw Law Bler relocation site in Nyaunglebin District, Karen State as it looked in April 2006. This barren site was built on flat rice fields confiscated from local villagers without compensation. Each family was allocated a plot of only 10 armspans square (approx. 15 metres).  
[Photo: KHRG]

Furthermore, the increased proximity of villagers to SPDC army soldiers significantly increases the likelihood that they will be subjected to human rights abuses. Villagers interned in SPDC-controlled relocation sites are regularly called upon to provide forced labour for the military, constructing and maintaining roads and military camps (of both the SPDC and ceasefire armies), portering supplies along those roads to outlying camps, serving as guides and human minesweepers in military operations, and as servants, messengers and errand runners for the soldiers. (For more information, see Chapter 1: Forced Labour and Forced Conscription). The villagers also face countless other demands for money, food, building materials and other goods. Villagers have also been beaten and tortured by the soldiers when the endless stream of demands is not met.<sup>19</sup>

While reliable figures do not exist for the entire country, studies have been conducted on the population of relocation sites in eastern Burma. According to a survey conducted by the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), as many as 118,000 IDPs were interned in relocation sites administered by the SPDC in eastern Burma in 2006. This constitutes

approximately one quarter of displacement in eastern Burma. Over half of this group (approximately 58 percent) was located in Tenasserim Division with 69,100 IDPs. The second largest population was found in southern Shan State with 31,300 IDPs. Karenni State, eastern Pegu Division, Karen State and Mon State rounded out the figures each with between 6,400 and 500 IDPs in relocation sites. These statistics represent an increase of 10,000 individuals interned in relocation sites over figures collected in 2005.<sup>20</sup>

## **IDP Hiding Sites**

Many villagers in ethnic minority areas choose to live in hiding from the SPDC and their proxy ceasefire armies on account of the abuse they have suffered at the hands of such groups. Many villagers, knowing all too well how they will be treated if found; constantly flee in the face of SPDC army patrols. This class of IDPs maintain a strong affinity with their land and would rather remain in hiding and hardship within the vicinity of their destroyed or abandoned villages than relocate to SPDC-controlled relocation sites or flee to neighbouring countries.<sup>21</sup> By not only refusing to relocate when ordered but also by fleeing deeper into the forest where they hope to live beyond the reach of the SPDC, IDPs living in hiding are considered to support resistance groups and as such are looked upon the same as arms-bearing combatants.

Conditions facing IDPs in hiding differ from those in relocation sites in that by avoiding all contact with the military, they are not obliged to perform forced labour or comply with demands for extortion. However, IDPs in hiding must remain ever vigilant and prepared to flee from approaching SPDC army columns who mount sweeps through the forest in search of them. Their food supplies and hiding sites are systematically destroyed when discovered and if seen, they will be shot-on-sight. Necessity therefore dictates that IDP hiding sites must be small and well hidden deep in the forest where it will be hard for patrols to find them. However, this is not always the case and rapid military expansionism has meant that many IDP hiding sites are only an hour's walk away from the nearest army camp. Some are even closer.

Being temporary settlements that must be abandoned at a moment's notice should the need arise, IDP hiding sites typically lack all but the most basic of village infrastructure. Access to clean water and healthcare is often limited and as a result disease is rife. Incidences of IDPs dying from easily preventable and readily treatable diseases such as diarrhoea are high.<sup>22</sup>

IDPs in hiding sites have repeatedly stated that their greatest concern is their lack of food security. The systematic destruction of their food supplies and their inability to freely travel to markets has made it extremely difficult for IDPs to obtain sufficient food supplies.<sup>23</sup> IDPs thus grow small cash crops of betelnut, dogfruit, cardamom, or other similar crops which they surreptitiously sell in markets despite the danger to themselves so they can buy rice for their families. Most IDPs in hiding will also conceal small food caches in the forest in preparation for the inevitability that they will need to flee again.

The available data suggests that the highest concentrations of IDPs living in hiding are located in eastern Burma. According to figures published by the TBBC, there were 95,000 IDPs in hiding in eastern Burma in 2006, marking an increase of 3,000 over the previous year's estimates. Karen State recorded the highest numbers for IDPs in hiding with 49,100 – an increase of approximately 10,000 individuals in the past 12 months. This is hardly surprising given the scale of the ongoing military offensive in northern Karen State. The

levels recorded from other areas in the sample were considerably lower. Eastern Pegu Division concealed 17,400 IDPs in hiding, indicating an increase of 4,000 since 2005. However, it should be noted that eastern Pegu Division as defined in the TBBC report constitutes what the Karen refer to as Nyaunglebin District, thus the increase observed in this region stems from SPDC army attacks as part of the continuing military offensive.<sup>24</sup>



Karen IDPs constructing shelters in the forest in the Yeh Mu Plaw area, Papun District in June 2006. [Photo: FBR]

## Ceasefire Areas

According to the TBBC, almost 60 percent of all internally displaced persons living in eastern Burma live in areas administered by the various ethnic ceasefire groups. The TBBC maintains that many IDPs are drawn to these areas by the relative degree of protection that the ceasefire groups offer against SPDC abuses. However, this is not the case in all ceasefire areas; in some areas, villagers have reported suffering equal, if not greater, human rights abuses from the DKBA as compared to the SPDC.<sup>25</sup> While in many cases, ceasefire areas may provide a temporary respite from human rights violations perpetrated by the SPDC, most ceasefire authorities are unable to adequately provide for IDPs who have taken refuge in areas under their administration. In their report on internal displacement, the TBBC stated:

*“[T]hese areas can not provide a sustainable solution for the internally displaced due to population density with limited access to sustainable agricultural land, SPDC restrictions on travel outside of ceasefire areas, and the inability of ethnic nationality authorities to support resettlement or compensate for livelihood assets lost.”<sup>26</sup>*

According to TBBC, there were an estimated 287,000 IDPs living in ceasefire areas. Compared to figures from 2005, this represented a decrease of 53,000. The decrease was attributed largely to “*population movements ... out of areas administered by the United Wa State Army (UWSA) due to lack of livelihood opportunities*”.<sup>27</sup>

## 13.4 Humanitarian Assistance

The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement clearly state that the SPDC is under obligation to protect and provide aid to those who have been internally displaced. Principle 3(1) states that “*National authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons within their jurisdiction.*” The adequacy of humanitarian assistance can be measured in its effectiveness to address the immediate difficulties faced by IDPs while supporting the longer recovery processes of those harmed, and promoting positive change in the attitudes and structures that neglect human rights and contribute to such harm. Such principles, however, are inconsistent with the policies of the SPDC towards IDPs. The SPDC fails to provide any form of humanitarian assistance to IDPs, primarily because their displacement is the desired result of the conflict, not a consequence of it.

Faced with a lack of protection from the regime, the internally displaced are in need of considerable humanitarian assistance. Severe threats to IDP health arise from the targeted destruction of IDP food supplies. A report released by the Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT) in September 2006, showed how “[f]ood destruction and theft were ... very closely tied to several adverse health consequences”, pointing out that “[f]amilies which had suffered this abuse in the preceding twelve months were almost 50% more likely to suffer a death in the household”.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, unhygienic conditions in which many IDPs live contribute to various types of infection. According to KHRG, many villagers who were forcibly relocated to the Play Hsa Loh relocation Site in Toungoo District, Karen State in June 2006 became ill with what could have been “*typhoid, dysentery and/or cholera*” as a result of the cramped and unsanitary conditions that they were forced to live in.<sup>29</sup> The most common illnesses contributing to deaths among IDP communities surveyed in eastern Burma have been reported as malaria, diarrhoea, and acute respiratory infection at prevalence rates of 42 percent, 22 percent, and 12 percent respectively.<sup>30</sup> It is difficult for IDPs living in hiding to acquire medicines on account of the lack of safe access to markets and the extortionate prices demanded for medications that exist far beyond the means of most who find themselves in this situation. Meanwhile, IDPs living in military-controlled relocation sites also find it exceedingly difficult to obtain medicines owing to prohibitions on the possession of medicines for fear that they will be given to resistance groups. IDPs therefore often try to treat themselves with traditional herbal medicines, which though very effective for many illnesses, are often inadequate. (For more information, see Chapter 9: Education and Health).

The SPDC has consistently restricted the access of humanitarian agencies into conflict-affected areas because of the political sensitivity of these regions. Clearly the regime does not wish for the international community to bear witness to the atrocities that are being committed in these areas. International humanitarian assistance to IDPs in these areas has been repeatedly denied. Meanwhile, in many areas experiencing ethnic conflict the demand is being met, at least to a degree by local humanitarian organizations who clandestinely travel into these areas to deliver aid to those in need. While some of these organizations are affiliated with resistance groups, many of them remain independent.

## 13.5 Situation in Arakan State

Being the home to the Rohingya, the SPDC has deliberately targeted the people of northern Arakan State for years in a determined campaign to adulterate the ethnic composition of the region. The population of northern Arakan State is estimated at around 800,000<sup>31</sup> with approximately 80 percent of this number being Rohingya. The remaining 20 percent is composed mostly of the Arakanese (Rakhine), with smaller percentages of Mro, Daignet, Kamein, Thet and Chin also being represented.<sup>32</sup> (For more information, see Chapter 8: Rights of Ethnic Minorities).

Debate over the “*Rohingya issue*” continues in both Burma and Bangladesh as both countries refuse to claim the Rohingya as their own. As such, the Rohingya have in effect been rendered stateless. In Burma, the Rohingya are denied citizenship and thus all of the rights befitting a citizen. Moreover, as Muslims, the Rohingya are particularly vulnerable to harassment by the predominantly-Buddhist SPDC authorities. The NaSaKa, (Border Security Force) have been responsible for the majority of violations of human rights perpetrated against the Rohingya.

There is no overt armed conflict in northern Arakan State so internal displacement typically occurs as villagers flee human rights abuses by SPDC forces or are forcibly relocated to make way for the construction of “*model villages*”. Under the ‘model village’ project, Buddhist Burman settlers from central Burma are resettled in northern Arakan State by the SPDC to deliberately dilute the ethnic and religious composition of the region. The new settlers, known as NaTaLa (named after the Ministry of Border Affairs who oversees the project) villagers, are given gifts and incentives by the authorities while the local Rohingya communities are provided with nothing. Moreover, much of that which is given to the NaTaLa villagers is stolen or confiscated from the Rohingya. Villagers are forced out of their homes and much of their farmland is confiscated to be given to the settlers. Rohingya villagers are often told that their homes had been built on land not zoned for residential construction, despite the fact that many villages that have been told this have stood for as long as 20 years. The villagers are then issued with forced relocation orders and their homes are subsequently destroyed and the land given to the settlers. Mosques and other village infrastructure have similarly been destroyed.

There has been some speculation that those being resettled to northern Arakan are the undesirable elements that the SPDC does not want ‘polluting’ urban centres such as Rangoon. One schoolteacher from Buthidaung Township who had lost much of his land to the new settlers stated that he believed the NaTaLa villagers were predominantly “*long term prisoners, drug addicts, HIV patients and poor Burman people from central Burma*”.<sup>33</sup> There may, however, be some plausibility to this argument. In August 2006, a health worker from Maungdaw hospital stated on condition on anonymity that out of 320 new settlers to Shwe Yin Aye village in Maungdaw Township, 69 of them suffered from HIV.<sup>34</sup>

Comprehensive studies on internal displacement like those produced by the TBBC for eastern Burma do not exist in Arakan State, and as such the true scale of displacement in the region is unknown.

It was reported in March 2006, that 40 households in Kyauk Ta Lone village in Kyauk Taw Township had been earlier issued with forced relocation orders so that the military authorities could carry out an archaeological excavation in their village. The villagers were told that the

all homes must have been evacuated by 2007 so that they could be demolished and the excavation begun. Kyauk Ta Lone village is believed to have been the site where the historical and revered Mahamuni Buddha image was cast and that military authorities were looking to cash in by finding other historical artefacts in the region. IB #376 was reported as being responsible for ordering the eviction.<sup>35</sup>

On 1 April 2006, 60-year-old Noor Mohammed from Pach Khali village in Buthidaung Township was summoned to a nearby NaSaKa camp and ordered to sign a paper stating that he was willingly relinquishing five acres of his farm land to the military authorities. The land was to be reallocated to Burma settlers relocated from central Burma as part of the SPDC's policy of "*Burmanization*". However, when he refused to sign, he was detained and tortured, both physically and mentally for 13 days until he agreed to sign the paper. Similarly, on 13 April, the same group of soldiers summoned Noor Mohammed's 30-year-old son, Mohammed Salim, from nearby Lanbow Bill village to their camp and made similar demands of him. Like his father, he refused and was subsequently tortured by the soldiers until he signed the paper. A school teacher from the village was reported to say, "*We are facing a major problem as the army authorities are demanding our farmland where we live in our motherland. If we have no farmland how [will] we survive?*"<sup>36</sup>

On 15 April 2006, NaSaKa authorities burned almost all of the 100 homes in Mogh Bill village, Buthidaung Township to the ground following a clash between the Rohingya residents and newly-arrived Burman settlers in which one Burman was killed. A group of Burman settlers had entered the village before dawn armed with swords, knives and sticks to rob the village when some of the Rohingya residents woke up and raised the alarm. A violent clash ensued in which one of the thieves was killed. Later that morning, two groups of NaTaLa soldiers from LIB #564 went to the village and beat whoever they could find, however, most of the villagers knew that there would be trouble and had already fled. The NaSaKa soldiers later issued orders to the Rohingya villagers to relocate to nearby Maung Gyi Taung village. "*We lost every thing, our farms, houses, lakes, fruit bearing trees and lawns*", said one of the village leaders.<sup>37</sup>

## 13.6 Situation in Chin State

Chin State, situated in northwestern Burma adjacent to India's restive northeast, is reputed to be one of the country's least developed regions. Though no reliable data exists to support such a claim, the population of the state is believed to stand at approximately 500,000. According to official documents, the state is inhabited by as many as 53 distinct ethnic minorities. (For more information, see Chapter 8: Rights of Ethnic Minorities). Approximately 90 percent of the majority Chin people adhere to some branch of Christianity. This has resulted in a high degree of religious persecution committed against the Chin by the SPDC as they pursue their policy of Burmanization.

In June 2006, soldiers from LIB #550 went to Sat Shai village in Paletwa Township and burned down the home of the village head along with several field huts on suspicion that the villagers supported members of the opposition Chin National Army (CNA). Fearing further repercussions, many villagers from Sat Shai fled to live in other villages.<sup>38</sup>

In July 2006, the Hakha Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) issued relocation orders to at least 50 households in the Chin State capital of Hakha. The orders reportedly came from Tactical Operations Commander Colonel Tin Hla to make way for the expansion of a Buddhist monastery.<sup>39</sup>

On 5 September 2006, the residents of Tluangram village in Thang Tlang Township were issued a directive to relocate to an SPDC-appointed relocation site. U Laito, chairman of the Thang Tlang TDPC ordered the villagers, whose families had been living in the village for the past 100 years, to complete the relocation by December 2006. Most of the villagers were unhappy with the orders as the new site suffered from a shortage of water. One villager affected by the order was reported to have said "*I don't want to stay at the new place. Instead, I would rather move to a nearby village or Mizoram state of India*".<sup>40</sup>

It was reported on 13 September 2006 that new plans by the SPDC to enforce military training on adult members of the Chin community had forced chin villagers to flee their homes to avoid the training. In September 2006, two men from Matupi fled to Mizoram State in India to escape being forced into the training. Others were reported to have fled to neighbouring Kachin State. One local resident said "*We are old and there is no benefit in attending such training. The army just wants to restrain people*".<sup>41</sup>

## 13.7 Situation in Kachin State

The isolation of Kachin State has restricted the dissemination of information about human rights abuses being perpetrated within the region as well as the scale of internal displacement. As such, no accurate figures on internal displacement within Kachin State are currently available. However, the area has witnessed a long history of armed resistance against military rule. Numerous armed groups, most notably the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), along with their armed wing, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), struggled for autonomy from the 1960s until the mid-1990s. During this period the military forcibly relocated as many as 100,000 Kachin civilians as part of their counter-insurgency campaign.<sup>42</sup>

In 1994, the KIO signed a ceasefire agreement with the military regime and since that time the state has undergone a steady increase in SPDC military control. Over the years, the SPDC has sought to intensify its exploitation of Kachin State's vast mineral reserves including jade, gold, platinum and coal which, given the junta's proven track record of human rights violations associated with SPDC-sponsored development projects, leaves little doubt that villagers living around such resources have faced chronic harassment.<sup>43</sup> There have been instances in the past where the SPDC and private companies have worked together to forcibly evict villagers living in areas where the junta had granted mining concessions to those private companies. Presumably, the regime's assistance was paid for with kickbacks and percentages of the profits from such mining operations. (For more information, see Chapter 8: Rights of Ethnic Minorities).



An IDP hiding site in Nyaunglebin District, Karen State. The inhabitants of this settlement have had to flee numerous times over the past several years as they have tried to evade the regular SPDC army patrols that have hunted them. *[Photo: KHRG]*

## 13.8 Situation in Karen State

Karen State has experienced continuous armed conflict since 1949 when the Karen took up arms against the regime shortly after Burma gained independence. Conflict-induced displacement has thus remained pervasive. However, as a result of the ever-expanding military presence, the main sources of internal displacement are the myriad human rights violations inflicted on civilian Karen villagers by SPDC army soldiers and their allied ceasefire armies. Forced labour, extortion, and forced relocation have traditionally been the greatest causes of displacement in Karen State.<sup>44</sup> However, since November 2005, when the SPDC resumed large scale military offensives in the region, perhaps the largest catalyst for displacement has been military assaults on undefended civilian villages. The Free Burma Rangers (FBR) has estimated that approximately 25,000 villagers became newly displaced in the 12 months since the beginning of the offensive.<sup>45</sup> Many of these villagers had experienced displacement on numerous previous occasions.

Displacement in Karen State is rarely a single event, but rather a repeating cycle of displacement and return. Often, villagers will flee their homes whenever SPDC army patrols draw near their hiding sites. They then wait in the forest in the vicinity of their villages as long as the soldiers are in the area. As soon as the soldiers move on, the villagers return to their villages to salvage whatever the soldiers did not steal or destroy. The whole cycle repeats whenever the soldiers return to the area. For many villages, this cycle can move full circle several times within the period of a year. Displacement, particularly in northern Karen State, is far from being a single static event where villagers flee and resettle in another area.

Throughout the offensive, SPDC army soldiers have deployed antipersonnel landmines in their thousands in an area already suffering from some of the most extensive mine contamination on the planet. These mines have been planted in civilian villages, on paths used by villagers and in their fields and plantations. The soldiers have sown relocated or abandoned villages with mines to prevent the former inhabitants from being able to return safely. Mines have also been laid in great numbers to restrict villagers' movements. (For more information, see Chapter 16: Landmines in Burma).

It must be acknowledged that the attacks witnessed in northern Karen State are directly and purposefully targeting undefended civilian villages, not the armed resistance of the Karen National Liberation Army. Given that the villagers are the intended targets of the attacks, and not merely "*collateral damage*" of counter-insurgency operations,<sup>46</sup> most of the internal displacement witnessed in Karen State can thus be categorized as "human rights-induced", rather than "conflict-induced". (For more information, see Section 13.2: Causes of Displacement in Burma above).

In January 2004, the Karen National Union (KNU; the main Karen resistance group) and the SPDC formed a verbal "*gentlemen's agreement*" to observe a ceasefire. Yet, despite the existence of this agreement, the SPDC persisted in their attacks and exploitation of Karen civilians. Some have argued that this offensive was made possible by the existence of a ceasefire: the SPDC used the new-found freedoms afforded to them under the ceasefire to expand their zone of control into areas where they were never previously able to operate without coming under attack by KNLA soldiers. They also used this time to build more army camps and expand their network of military access roads, along which they forced villagers to porter supplies and munitions to those new camps.<sup>47</sup> In September 2006, after almost a

year of near-daily attacks and human rights violations, the SPDC formally declared the ceasefire null and void and announced that a new round of talks were required.

Plans for the construction of the Weigyi dam continued to be mulled in 2006. Villagers living near the proposed site remained displaced and should the construction proceed, thousands more are expected to become displaced.<sup>48</sup>

According to the TBBC survey of internal displacement in eastern Burma, there were 99,300 IDPs living in officially-demarcated Karen State during 2006. A further 23,800 IDPs were recorded in eastern Pegu Division, which, according to the Karen demarcation of territory represents Nyaunglebin District, and for the purposes of this report, shall be considered together. (For more information, see Notes on the Text, in which the disputed demarcation of territory is explained). This therefore represents an internally displaced population of approximately 123,100; up from the approximately 111,200 estimated in 2005. This increase of 11,900 can be attributed to the ongoing military offensive in northern Karen State and eastern Pegu Division. Furthermore, the TBBC also recorded that 119 villages had been destroyed, relocated or abandoned during 2006; while a further 79 villages in eastern Pegu Division suffered a similar fate.<sup>49</sup>

On 2 February 2006, SPDC army soldiers ordered villagers from Pah Der Kah, Klaw Mi Der, and Thay Yah Yu villages in Than Daung Township of Toungoo District to relocate to the western side of the Day Loh River. Some of the villagers refused to comply with the orders and instead moved to other villages or fled deeper into the hills. A number of these villagers were reported to have died after stepping on SPDC army landmines. Some villagers were also reported to have been subsequently apprehended by the SPDC and executed. Details of those villagers killed were not provided.<sup>50</sup>

On 2 March 2006, SPDC army soldiers shelled Yer Loh village with a volley of 60 mm and 81 mm mortars. The soldiers fired 7 mortars at the village, only 2 of which actually landed in the village. Three more shells were fired into nearby Plaw Baw Der, none of which found their mark. All of the villagers fled nonetheless.<sup>51</sup>

In March 2006, three columns of SPDC army soldiers from Ma La Daw, Mu Thay and Myaw Oo moved through Mon Township of Nyaunglebin District in search of IDPs hiding in the forest. Villagers testified that they were forced to relocate regularly to stay ahead of the advancing columns. Then on 27 March 2006, they were seen by SPDC army soldiers who opened fire on them as they were attempting to cross an open field. One villager was shot and killed as he tried to help his 80-year-old mother who had also been shot. A 9-year-old girl was also shot in the stomach but was able to continue walking on her own for some time.<sup>52</sup>

On 1 April 2006, it was reported that approximately 2,000 villagers from 16 villages in Tantabin Township of Toungoo District had become displaced as a result of SPDC army attacks and were hiding in the forest, unable to return home for fear of encountering the SPDC army soldiers. A further 3,000 newly-displaced IDPs were also reported to be facing similar circumstances in Nyaunglebin District.<sup>53</sup>

On 4 April 2006, Camp Commander Thaw Htay from LIB #590 ordered Paw Hi Der village in Nyaunglebin District to move to an SPDC-controlled relocation site. However, the villagers managed to negotiate being exempt from the forced relocation order by paying the camp commander 1,500,000 kyat.<sup>54</sup>

On 4 April 2006, LIB #439 Deputy Commander Zaw Htun issued orders to villagers from the following village tracts to relocate to the Plaw Law Bler relocation site in Nyaunglebin District within seven days. The villagers were told to dismantle their homes prior to leaving and that should anyone remain behind, the soldiers would return and burn the village. The village tracts which received this order included:

1. Pa T'Lah village tract;
2. Noh Ghaw village tract; and
3. Weh Ka Daw village tract.<sup>55</sup>

An FBR report dated 4 April 2006, stated while on their way to distribute aid to communities displaced by continuing SPDC army attacks, FBR teams "*Almost everyday [were] passed by families fleeing*".<sup>56</sup>

On 5 April 2006, Commander Tin Aung of TOC #3 under LID #66 ordered the following villages in Toungoo District to start relocating to Play Hsa Loh on the following day. The next day, they were told that the relocation must be complete by 20 April 2006. The villages affected by this order included:

1. Lay Gwo Loh;
2. Baw Pa;
3. Yer Loh;
4. Blaw Baw Der;
5. Ta Pa Kee; and
6. Mwee Loh.<sup>57</sup>

On 8 April 2006, a column of SPDC army troops from LIB #562, LIB #567 and IB #440 ordered Yu Loh and Ka Mu Loh villages in southern Tantabin Township, Toungoo District to relocate to the SPDC-controlled relocation site in Play Hsa Loh village. According to the report, "*the livelihood of the villagers, who were dependent on their [betelnut] and durian plantations, was undermined by the relocation*".<sup>58</sup>

On 21 April 2006, SPDC army troops from Column #1 and Column #2 of LIB #10 burned down 30 civilian villager homes in Thay Yah Yu village, Toungoo District.<sup>59</sup>

On 22 April 2006, LIB #10 burned 30 homes in Tha Yay Yu village in Than Daung Township of Toungoo District.<sup>60</sup>

On 23 April 2006, Commander Soe Myint of LIB #10 led his men to Maw Mee Ko village in Than Daung Township of Toungoo District where they burned 17 houses to the ground.<sup>61</sup>

On 25 April 2006, Klaw Mi Der village in Toungoo District was issued orders to relocate to Pa Leh Wah. By 24 May 2006, 50 households had moved though approximately 60 households were unaccounted for. It was assumed that these villagers had fled into the forest.<sup>62</sup>

On 25 April 2006, SPDC army soldiers forcibly relocated Ler Sah Kwee village to Ywa Myo village in Shwegyin Township, Nyaunglebin District.<sup>63</sup>

On 27 April 2006, LIB #361 burned down 8 homes down in Hta Koh Tah Baw village in Papun District. The villagers fled into the forest where they remained for three days before returning to their village on 30 April 2006. Shortly after, on 1 May 2006, the Hta Koh Tah Baw villagers had heard that SPDC army patrols were in the area again and the following day they fled into the forest again.<sup>64</sup>

From 1-6 May 2006, SPDC army troops from 2 columns of LIB #1, 2 columns of LIB #108, 1 column of LIB #4 attacked Hsaw Wah Der and other nearby villages in Toungoo District. As a result, over 100 people were forced to flee their homes and hide in the forest.<sup>65</sup>

In May 2006, SPDC army attacks on villages and sweeps through the hills in search of IDPs slowed as the SPDC army re-supplied its bases.<sup>66</sup>

On 8 May 2006, at 11:00 am, SPDC army soldiers from IB #1 burned 5 homes in Hsaw Wah Der village in Toungoo District.<sup>67</sup>

On 9 May 2006, LIB #362 and LIB #363 attacked Tha Boe Plaw village in Lu Thaw Township, Papun District and burned 50 homes. Approximately 1,000 villagers fled into the forest where they tried to secrete themselves near the Yunzalin River.<sup>68</sup>

In mid-May 2006, the FBR reported that the following numbers of newly-displaced villagers from Toungoo District:

1. Along the Toungoo-Mawchi Road, over 2,500;
2. Between the Toungoo-Mawchi road and the Kler Lah-Bu Sah Kee road, over 1,500;
3. From the Kler Lah- Bu Sah Kee road to the Yaw Lo Kloh River, over 500; and
4. From the Yaw Lo Kloh River and the Nyaunglebin District border, over 2,000.<sup>69</sup>

Between 2 and 14 June 2006, SPDC army soldiers moved through the region south of Naw Yo Hta in Papun District mortaring and burning all villages they found. As a result, approximately 3,000 villagers became displaced, representing the entire population of the region.<sup>70</sup>

On 6 June 2006 a column of SPDC army troops from Wah Beh Thee camp engaged with KNLA soldiers as they attempted to advance into the Thaw Du Kee area of Papun District to attack the approximately 1,100 IDPs hiding in the area. Some of the villages reported to have fled included:

1. Thay Thoo Der, 301 people;
2. Tah Paw Der, 209 people;
3. Tah Mae Der, 56 people;
4. They Ko Mu Der, 90 people;
5. Mo Kee Ber Kaw, 42 people; and
6. Baw Gwaw, 300 people.<sup>71</sup>

On 15 June 2006, SPDC LIB #66 Intelligence Officer Myo Tun ordered villagers from Yay Tho Gyi and Yay Tho Lay in Toungoo district to move away from their villages. He did not specify where they were supposed to go.<sup>72</sup>

On 19 June 2006, 70 families from 12 villages around Kler Lah village in Toungoo District were ordered by the SPDC army soldiers to relocate to a new location near Bu Hsa Kee.<sup>73</sup>

On 3 August 2006, soldiers from LIB #567 ordered Peh Taw Day village in Toungoo District to relocate. The villagers were told that if anyone remained behind in the village, they would be shot-on-sight.<sup>74</sup>

On 26 October 2006, SPDC army soldiers from IB #242 opened fire on an IDP hiding site at Htee Na Hta in Nyaunglebin District. There were no casualties reported and it was stated that most people were believed to have escaped.<sup>75</sup>

On 28 October 2006, SPDC army soldiers burned down 13 houses and one school in Taw Po Hta village in Mone township of Nyaunglebin District after the villagers had already fled.<sup>76</sup>

On 1 November 2006, Saw They Shur was burned alive when SPDC army soldiers set fire to his village. At approximately 5:30 pm, the soldiers entered Play Hta village in Toungoo District causing all of the villagers to flee into the forest. However, Saw They Shur was sick at the time an unable to run along with the rest of the villagers.<sup>77</sup>

On 6 November 2006, 60 families fled their village in Mone Township following SPDC army attacks. These 60 families, comprising a total of 260 people made their way to the Salween River where they hoped to find safety in the IDP camps located along the river.<sup>78</sup>

In November 2006, the following villages in Toungoo District had been displaced and were on the run from SPDC army patrols that hunted them like animals:

Tha Aye Kee;  
Ha Htoe Per;  
Klay Hta;  
Thay Ku Der;  
Hsaw Wah Der;  
Hee Daw Khaw;  
Kho Kee;  
Sho Ser;  
Wa Soe; and  
Klay Kee.<sup>79</sup>

In November 2006, FBR reported that 32 villages from the following village tracts in Nyaunglebin District were on the run from SPDC army patrols:

1. Ler Kla village tract, 8 villages;
2. Saw Ka Der village tract, 3 villages;
3. Htee Ler Baw Hta village tract, 4 villages;
4. Kwee Dee Kaw village tract, 6 villages;
5. Kyauk Phya village tract, 3 villages,
6. Thet Baw Der village tract, 4 villages;
7. Saw Tay Der village tract, 2 villages;
8. Kwey Po Der village tract, 1 village; and
9. Yaw Kee village tract, 1 village.<sup>80</sup>

## 13.9 Situation in Karenni State

Conflict between the regime and armed resistance forces has persisted in Karenni State since the 1950s. However, in 1994, the Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF) signed a ceasefire pact with the SPDC in 1994 and has since become an ally of the regime, often acting as a proxy army for the SPDC military. In March of the following year, the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) also agreed to a ceasefire with the regime. However the ceasefire was short-lived and fighting resumed just a few months later. (For more information, see Chapter 8: Rights of Ethnic Minorities).

In August 2005, announced that they were willing to return to the negotiation table, and were prepared to reinstate the abandoned 1995 ceasefire agreement. However, the SPDC's idea of negotiation was to demand the full and unconditional surrender of the KNPP, an ultimatum that the KNPP rejected. In 2006 the KNPP declared its willingness to resume ceasefire talks with the regime, whose response was only that they were all too busy and officially branded the KNPP as a "terrorist group" in May 2006.<sup>81</sup>

Internal displacement in Karenni State has mostly come about as a result of forced relocation orders issued to civilian villages, along with flight away from areas following clashes between Karenni Army (KA) soldiers and the SPDC.

According to TBBC, there were a total of 79,300 IDPs in Karenni State during 2006. This figure represents a marked decrease of 16,800 persons from 92,500 estimated for 2005. SPDC expansion into areas controlled by the KNPLF was given as the reason for such a large decline in numbers. Approximately 80 percent of all IDPs counted in the TBBC survey lived in areas under the administration of the various ceasefire armies operating in the state. Out of a total of 63,600 IDPs in ceasefire areas, the majority were said to be living in areas controlled by the KNPLF. IDPs in hiding and IDPs in SPDC-controlled relocation sites accounted for 9,300 and 6,400 individuals respectively.<sup>82</sup>



Karen villagers hiding in the forest in April 2006. An estimated 25,000 villagers had abandoned their homes to flee from SPDC army attacks during 2006. [Photo: FBR]

## 13.10 Situation in Mon State

In 1995, the main Mon opposition group, the New Mon State Party (NMSP), signed a ceasefire pact with the junta and since that time the majority of Mon State has been relatively free of active armed conflict. However, SPDC army troops have continued to sporadically clash with Mon splinter factions still opposing the regime as well as with Karen resistance forces operating in Mon areas. As a result of such periodic skirmishes and the continuation of human rights abuses in SPDC-controlled and mixed administration areas, internal displacement has remained an issue. Most of those who have abandoned their homes have fled to areas controlled by the NMSP. In areas of mixed administration, SPDC army soldiers have continued to commit human rights abuses including forced relocation, forced labour, extortion, and land confiscation that have ultimately led to additional internal displacement.<sup>83</sup>

The TBBC estimated there to be 41,800 IDPs in Mon State as of November 2006, reflecting a decrease of almost 7,000 persons over the past year. Though approximately 500 individuals were reported to live in SPDC-controlled relocation sites and a further 300 were said to be living in hiding in the forest, almost all IDPs in Mon State live in areas that come under the administration of the NMSP.<sup>84</sup>

On 23 April 2006, residents of Three Pagoda Pass were issued orders to move to an SPDC-appointed resettlement site. Approximately five square kilometres of land, encompassing 70 homes was confiscated to make way for an unnamed development project. In the new site, the villagers were only granted a small plot of land measuring 40 feet wide by 60 feet deep on barren land devoid of any trees and without any form of water supply.<sup>85</sup>

In June 2006, the Mon Relief and Development Committee (MRDC) reported that over 1,500 people from four villages in Ye township faced food shortages as a direct result of confiscation of land and movement restrictions.<sup>86</sup>

According to a report released by the Human Right Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) in July 2006, approximately 8,000 acres of land were confiscated from Mon villagers by SPDC army authorities between 1998 and 2002.<sup>87</sup>

## 13.11 Situation in Shan State

The diverse peoples of Shan State have experienced near continuous armed conflict since Burma was granted independence in 1948. Various armed groups have struggled for autonomy and for control over the state's vast natural resources. Following the surrender of a Shan State Army – South (SSA-S) Battalion Commander Colonel Moengzuen in early 2006, SPDC military presence in central Shan State increased dramatically as SPDC army units resumed attacks against SSA-S bases as well as a striking increase in human rights abuses being perpetrated against local villagers.<sup>88</sup> The ongoing clashes have placed immense strain on the lives of the villagers. In December 2006, 20 villagers fled their homes in Mongkerng Township following an SSA-S ambush which killed eight SPDC army soldiers. The villagers had been warned that ten villagers would be executed for the death of every SPDC army soldier.<sup>89</sup> Throughout November and December 2006, the number of SPDC army battalions operating in Shan State swelled as the regime continued its near-daily attacks against SSA-S bases. By mid-December, there were as many as seven SPDC army battalions leading coordinated attacks. Other reports maintained that United Wa State Army (UWSA) soldiers had also been involved in the attacks, although the UWSA denied this claim.<sup>90</sup> The fighting resulted in creating conditions of great insecurity for local villagers.<sup>91</sup> (For more information, see Chapter 8: Rights of Ethnic Minorities).

The mass forced relocation of ethnic Wa villagers from northern Shan State to the Thai-Burma border continued into 2006 under the pretext of drug eradication efforts. On 17 April 2006, approximately 2,000 Wa villagers were forcibly relocated to the Thai-Burma border by UWSA soldiers. The villagers had originated from Panghsang, the Wa administrative centre and were taken to Mongton Township *en masse* in 39 trucks. Unconfirmed reports claimed that a further 1,800 had been relocated to neighbouring Mong Hsat Township during April. According to the Lahu National Development organization, more than 126,000 Wa civilians had been forcibly relocated to locations along the Thai-Burma border since 1999. Meanwhile, the UWSA report that only 65,000 had been relocated. Two anonymous UWSA sources had reportedly said that this was to mark the last forced migration of Wa civilians to the Thai-Burma border. The latest confirmed batch of Wa villagers were resettled in the following villages in Mongton Township:

1. Wanmai Hsonkwi village;
2. Teuzan village;
3. Kiuzan village;
4. Kunghsa village;
5. Mongjard village; and
6. Monghta village.<sup>92</sup>

According to statistics published by the TBBC, Shan State is home to by far the highest number of IDPs in eastern Burma. According to their data, as of November 2006, there were an estimated 175,600 IDPs residing in Shan State. This represents approximately 35 percent of all IDPs included within their survey. Approximately three-quarters of this number lived in areas administered by armed ceasefire groups, with the vast majority of these living under the UWSA and SNPLO. These numbers indicate a decrease of approximately 43,000 individuals, which the TBBC attributed to “*population movements ... out of areas administered by the United Wa State Army (UWSA) due to lack of livelihood opportunities*” in addition to SPDC expansionism in parts of central Shan State controlled by the Shan State Army – North (SSA-N) rendering such areas no longer safe to assess.<sup>93</sup>

The TBBC report also maintained that a total of 33 villages were destroyed, relocated or abandoned from five different townships during 2006. Those villages in that category included:

1. Bong Jan village, Mong Pan Township;
2. Tong Ju village, Mong Pan Township;
3. Nong Yong village, Mong Pan Township;
4. Pa To village, Mong Hsat Township;
5. Sib Lak village, Mong Hsat Township;
6. Sang Kang village, Mong Hsat Township;
7. Yao Ba Luang village, Mong Hsat Township;
8. Mae Ko Nue village, Mong Hsat Township;
9. Wan Loi Nawk village, Mon Ton Township;
10. Wan Bar Nim village, Mon Ton Township;
11. Sar Hanar village, Mon Ton Township;
12. Wan Bar Voo village, Mon Ton Township;
13. Bang Wat village, Kunhing Township;
14. Wan Khai village, Kunhing Township;
15. Kun Gaw Wee village, Kunhing Township;
16. Hwe Aw village, Kunhing Township;
17. Wan Bartep village, Kunhing Township;
18. Wan Mai village, Kunhing Township;
19. Nam Mein village, Kunhing Township;
20. Mai Selee village, Kunhing Township;
21. Bar Mo village, Kunhing Township;
22. Nar Jong village, Kunhing Township;
23. Wan Jong village, Kunhing Township;
24. Kan Du Long village, Mawkmai Township;
25. Daw Sar Lar village, Mawkmai Township;
26. Daw Ta Lay village, Mawkmai Township;
27. Daw Keelay village, Mawkmai Township;
28. Wan Lok Vay village, Mawkmai Township;
29. Nong Yasai village, Mawkmai Township;
30. Hwe Kit village, Mawkmai Township;
31. Bang Mark Mu village, Mawkmai Township;
32. Wan Par Lom village, Mawkmai Township; and
33. Nar Mark Keng village, Mawkmai Township.<sup>94</sup>

In January 2006, the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) reported on the conditions confronting IDPs in central Shan State. According to the report, a leader among one of the IDP communities had said that, *“the situation is worse now than before because villagers fear both the Wa and Burma Army troops. He said the Burma Army soldiers take everything and are not interested in peace”*. Similarly, Colonel Yawd Serk, commanding officer of the opposition Shan State Army – South (SSA-S), was quoted to have said *“The abuse is only increasing and worsening every day on all accounts. People in Central Shan State are experiencing the severest human rights abuses including forced relocation, shooting of villagers at random and confiscation of properties”*.<sup>95</sup>

On 24 May 2006, five families, comprising 20 persons, were given orders to vacate the land that they had been living on for the past 20 years. The families, from Keng Tung were issued the eviction orders by local police to accommodate the expansion of a nearby police station.

In late July 2006, the villagers were finally forced off their land and were compelled to take refuge in an adjacent Buddhist monastery as no arrangements had been made by the authorities for their resettlement elsewhere. Approximately 1,200 square metres were confiscated. The families had reportedly filed complaints with community leaders, but no action was taken for fear of reprisals for speaking out.<sup>96</sup>

In August 2006, sources on both sides of the border predicted an imminent SPDC army attack on the SSA-S base at Loi Taleng. Another source believed that Loi Kawwan was to be the target, citing a proliferation of bunkers and “*greater demand for construction materials from Maesai [in Chiang Rai Province, Thailand]*”.<sup>97</sup> Such speculation makes local communities uneasy and fearing adverse humanitarian fallout from the conflict, become apprehensive and prepare their belongings in preparation to flee.



Karen villagers from Toungoo District seeking shelter from the heat of the midday sun on the bank of the Salween River in March 2006. These villagers trekked for approximately 2 weeks to reach the Thai-Burma border after their homes were destroyed in SPDC army attacks. By the end of 2006, almost 2,000 villagers had fled Toungoo District and sought refuge in IDP camps along the Salween River. However, given that they were still in Burma, they remained vulnerable to SPDC army attack. [Photo: KHRG]

## 13.12 Situation in Tenasserim Division

The junta began to increase its military presence in Tenasserim Division in 1988 as they looked to increase export earnings through the exploitation of the region's rich natural resources. Local populations have largely been considered obstacles to the regime's development strategies which have resulted in the widespread violations of human rights.

In the northern townships of Yebyu, Tavoy, and Theyetchaung continued to experience sporadic armed conflict during 2006. Mon splinter factions which broke away from the NMSP to continue opposing the regime have persisted in mounting ambushes against SPDC army units despite their lack of numbers. Villages living in the areas where such groups operate have suffered human rights abuses from the regime under suspicion that they had assisted the splinter factions. Villagers living in southern Tenasserim Division have experienced similar abuses where counter-insurgency operations ostensibly targeting the KNU led to additional civilian displacement during 2006. In June 2006, SPDC army soldiers mounted “*‘search and destroy’ operations against the KNU and its supporters*” in Palaw, Tenasserim, and Bokpyin townships. In the Narkapraw area of Bokpyin Township in April 2006, SPDC army patrols harassed villagers as they were preparing their hill fields for planting. The villagers became frightened and fled. In August 2006, the soldiers returned and deployed approximately 1,000 landmines in the area to discourage the villagers from returning to their fields. Similar conditions were reported to exist in the Ma Noe Roe area, south of Tenasserim town.<sup>98</sup>

Northern Tenasserim Division has also been the location of numerous SPDC-sponsored development projects, the majority of which have resulted in human rights violations, forced relocations and displacement. It was reported that the expansion of the Tavoy airport resulted in the confiscation of land during 2006.<sup>99</sup>

The 2006 TBBC survey of internal displacement in eastern Burma estimated there to be 80,200 IDPs in Tenasserim Division in 2006. Approximately 86 percent of this number were reported as being interned in SPDC-controlled relocation sites. An estimated 5,600 individuals were believed to be living in hiding, while 5,500 were recorded as living in areas under the administration of ceasefire groups. The overall number of IDPs in Tenasserim Division had decreased by 11,600 in the past year.<sup>100</sup>

## 13.13 Statistics of IDPs in Eastern Burma<sup>101</sup>

States and Divisions	IDPs in Hiding		IDPs in Relocation Sites		IDPs in Ceasefire Areas		Total IDPs	
	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006
South Shan	20,800	<b>13,300</b>	23,700	<b>31,300</b>	174,500	<b>131,000</b>	219,000	<b>175,600</b>
Karenni	9,500	<b>9,300</b>	7,500	<b>6,400</b>	75,500	<b>63,600</b>	92,500	<b>79,300</b>
East Pegu	13,400	<b>17,400</b>	7,900	<b>6,400</b>	0	<b>0</b>	21,300	<b>23,800</b>
Karen	38,800	<b>49,100</b>	6,100	<b>4,300</b>	45,000	<b>45,900</b>	89,900	<b>99,300</b>
Mon	2,500	<b>300</b>	6,200	<b>500</b>	40,000	<b>41,000</b>	48,700	<b>41,800</b>
Tenasserim	7,000	<b>5,600</b>	56,600	<b>69,100</b>	5,000	<b>5,500</b>	68,600	<b>80,200</b>
Overall	92,000	<b>95,000</b>	108,000	<b>118,000</b>	340,000	<b>287,000</b>	540,000	<b>500,000</b>

## Endnotes

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