

Development by Decree

The politics of poverty and control in Karen State



KHRG

Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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April 2007

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Cover photo: One of many similar order documents which SPDC Light Infantry Battalion #439 under Deputy Battalion Commander Zaw Htun posted in villages in Kyauk Kyi township of Nyaunglebin District in April 2006 stating that all houses must be dismantled within three days, after which SPDC soldiers would come to burn whatever was left in order to ensure the forced eviction of the entire civilian population to Plaw Law Bler relocation site. *[Photo: KHRG]*

Back cover photo: Villagers of Lay Kay and Khaw Po Pleh villages in Bilin township of Thaton District doing forced labour in January 2006 improving the road from Kyaik Khaw to Ka Dtaing Dtee in Papun District by order of Lay Kay camp commander Zaw Min Htun of SPDC Light Infantry Division #44. This part of the road crosses the Donthami River between Lay Kay and Khaw Po Pleh. *[Photo: KHRG]*

The Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) was founded in 1992 and documents the situation of villagers and townspeople in rural Burma through their direct testimonies, supported by photographic and other evidence. KHRG operates completely independently and is not affiliated with any political or other organisation. Examples of our work can be seen on the World Wide Web at www.khrg.org, or printed copies may be obtained subject to approval and availability by sending a request to khrg@khrg.org.

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Abstract

In pursuit of domestic submission and international recognition of its legitimacy the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) currently ruling Burma pronounces daily on the manifold military-implemented development programmes initiated across the country which, it argues, are both supported by and beneficial to local communities. Villagers in Karen State, however, consistently reject such claims. Rather, these individuals describe a systematic programme of military expansionism with which the junta aims to establish control over all aspects of civilian life. In the name of development, the regime's agenda in Karen State has involved multifarious infrastructure and regimentation projects that restrict travel and trade and facilitate increased extortion of funds, food, supplies and labour from the civilian population, thereby exacerbating poverty, malnutrition and the overall humanitarian crisis. Given the detrimental consequences of the SPDC's development agenda, villagers in Karen areas have resisted military efforts to control their lives and livelihoods under the rubric of development. In this way these villagers have worked to claim their right to determine for themselves the direction in which they wish their communities to develop. Drawing on over 90 interviews with local villagers in Karen State, SPDC order documents, official SPDC press statements, international media sources, reports by international aid agencies and academic studies this report finds that rather than prosperity, the SPDC's 'development' agenda has instead brought increased military control over civilian lives, undermined villagers' rights and delivered deleterious humanitarian outcomes contradictory to the very rhetoric the junta has used to justify its actions.

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I. Introduction and Executive Summary

“Inasmuch as the national unity is further strengthened, almost all of the areas of the Union have become peaceful and tranquil and they are achieving unprecedented development.”

– SPDC press statement (June 2006)¹

“If we were living as our ancestors according to their traditions, we wouldn’t have to worry about our daily survival. However, because the SPDC army came and based itself here and is creating so many problems, the villagers are facing many difficulties.”

– Saw T--- (male, 44), K--- village, Toungoo District (2006)

In the face of domestic and international calls for democracy, human rights and a return to civilian rule, the military regime holding power in Burma has sought to justify its continued control by appealing to the dual needs of security and prosperity. Explicit in its name, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has presented itself as legitimate on the grounds that it supports development work for the betterment of the wider populace. More precisely, this ostensible legitimacy is based on the dual claims that 1) military-implemented ‘development’ work improves the lives of the civilian populace and 2) these ‘development’ programmes are supported by local peoples. Thus, for example, the SPDC asserts that *“All over the Union, over 54 million population including 3.5 million [sic] of Kayin [Karen] nationals are residing in harmony and enjoying the socio-economic development brought about by the Government. All the national races are enjoying equal rights.”*² In thousands of interviews with KHRG over the past 15 years, however, villagers in Karen areas of eastern Burma have consistently rejected such claims. In their words, not only do SPDC-implemented development schemes fail to benefit local peoples – functioning as they do on exploitative practices, regime-centred initiatives and neglect of local voices – they moreover involve widespread, frequently violent, abuses against the civilian population. Indeed, such a framework is crucial to the expansion and consolidation of military rule. Even where development initiatives would otherwise be relatively benign, institutional corruption and inept implementation by military officials tend to convert potential benefit into burden.

Thus, development programmes that could plausibly prove beneficial in other countries become tools of oppression and generators of poverty when implemented under the SPDC. The expansion of roadways throughout Karen State, for instance, has involved military attacks against civilians in order to forcibly transfer them to relocation sites under military control where they function as an accessible source of exploitable labour for use in, amongst other

¹ “Press Conference: Entire Mon State and most areas of Kayin State are peaceful, tranquil Residential people there are enjoying fruitful results of development endeavours,” June 11th 2006. Accessed at www.myanmar.com/pressconference/index.html on February 7th 2007.

² Ibid.

things, constructing further roads. New road networks in turn allow SPDC forces to encroach further into rural areas of Karen State in pursuit of those civilians attempting to evade military control, and the cycle repeats itself. Agricultural programmes, such as forcing villagers to cultivate dry season paddy crops and castor plants from which they must provide a quota to SPDC forces; confiscating land for military or private business plantations; and forced labour on such plantations, all undermine civilian livelihoods and exacerbate poverty. Construction of hydroelectric dams, involving the mass relocation of the local civilian population without compensation, destruction of villages, large-scale flooding of forests and the devastation of river-based ecosystems, ruin civilian livelihoods and prevent any future return to ancestral lands. 'Model villages' set up by the SPDC allow for the internment of forcibly relocated villagers whom soldiers are then able to draw on as forced labour and sources of exportable funds, food and other supplies. Other 'model villages' built on lands confiscated from villagers serve to house new military bases with residential areas for soldiers and their families. Schools and clinics built using forced labour and money and materials extorted out of villagers are then left empty and without state financial support. To make matters worse, soldiers obstruct civilian access to medicine and medical supplies on the grounds that these could potentially reach armed opposition groups. The forced registration of the entire population living under SPDC control serves as a mechanism to determine quotas for extortion, forced labour and forced participation in parastatal organisations like the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA) and Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA). Lastly, by utilising the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) as a proxy militia in the implementation of both the SPDC's security and development agendas in some regions, the junta has effectively farmed out the role of repressing the Karen population under the banner of peace and prosperity. Military officers of the SPDC and its allied groups make large sums extorting money, labour and materials out of rural villagers in the name of 'development' projects, then remit their profits to their families who can use the money to start small businesses in the towns and cities – ironically creating the appearance of urban economic growth and 'development'.

Despite widespread and systematic abuse perpetrated by the SPDC in the name of development, foreign governments, UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have become increasingly eager to engage with the regime in the delivery of funds and services for multifarious aid initiatives. These agencies argue that given the humanitarian crisis existing in Burma it is ethically imperative to provide assistance, whether humanitarian, educational, vocational or infrastructural, irrespective of political concerns. Advocates of this perspective paint Burma's social and economic crisis as a corollary of generic third world poverty, unrelated to the current political context. In this light, poverty and the country's 'underdevelopment' can be ameliorated through the implementation of ostensibly 'apolitical' humanitarian and development aid.

Those who present this argument have often been critical of human rights and

democracy activists who demand some measure of conditionality on aid, or who advocate transparency and accountability in its delivery. This, they argue, effectively holds international aid – and thus the population in need – hostage to political change, thereby worsening and prolonging the humanitarian crisis. The right of civilians to humanitarian assistance must trump any political conditions or, indeed, any safeguards requiring transparency or accountability to local people. Underlying this argument is a rigid distinction between the humanitarian and political spheres.

In this way international aid agencies have painted those sceptical of the effectiveness of aid delivered through the SPDC as a selfish ‘anti-aid’ lobby willing to sacrifice the population of Burma for the sake of political goals narrowly defined as regime change. The International Crisis Group, for example, in a December 2006 review of humanitarian aid to Burma stated that those who were critical of international aid to the country “*considered efforts to help the country’s poor futile or even detrimental to the greater objective of regime change.*”³ Critical of what they believed to be the ‘politicisation’ of aid, the authors of the briefing cited the European Commission as stating “*The international community needs to be able to continue humanitarian operations without conditions.*”⁴ The argument is seemingly straightforward: aid is either provided unconditionally – something the humanitarian situation in Burma seemingly demands – or held hostage to the ransom of regime change.

Presenting the debate in this black-and-white light evades questions of transparency, accountability or input from local people, and avoids accepting responsibility for the political consequences of aid delivery. Furthermore, identifying the connection between politics and the implementation of development programmes is not to politicise aid, but simply to acknowledge a relationship that undeniably exists. In a highly totalitarian society such as Burma, where the ruling regime pervades all aspects of civilian life, every act is political in so far as it influences and comments on the role of power and authority. For its part, the SPDC has treated all facets of civilian life in terms of black and white, as threats or reinforcements to continued military rule. Any conscious decision must therefore either support, or at least consent to, military control or else dissent and resist such control; neutrality is not possible. Food aid to a relocation site can turn short-term unsustainable internment camps into long-term prisons; roads are not only trade routes but also tools of military control; agricultural programmes help the state to monitor, control and appropriate agricultural production.

³ “Myanmar: New Threats to Humanitarian Aid,” International Crisis Group, December 8th 2006.

⁴ Hypocritically, the ICG, the European Commission and the British Government have consistently opposed cross-border humanitarian aid from Thailand to displaced villagers in Karen State or have demanded strong conditionalities on any such aid, essentially arguing that villagers living outside state control should be denied aid on political grounds. Only very recently has the British government via the Department for International Development (DFID) released a small amount of funds for cross-border assistance in response to prolonged criticism of their traditional policy of refusing such aid.

The SPDC has been able to utilise large internationally-funded projects to further its political agenda and undermine the rights of villagers in Karen areas. UNICEF, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), UNAIDS, CARE and Médecins du Monde, for example, all provide funding for the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association, a coercive parastatal agency controlled by the SPDC and implicated in widespread extortion as part of its vigorous recruitment drives, wherein villagers are ordered to provide a quota of 'members' roughly equivalent to one woman per household, and pay money to the organisation for their membership applications. In some areas villagers have been led to believe that access to UNICEF-funded polio inoculation programmes requires that they enlist in the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation, another coercive parastatal organisation involved in similar coercive recruitment practices and demands for money. The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations has paid the SPDC US\$ 14 million to carry out an 'oil crop cultivation programme'; disregarding the manner in which the SPDC implements such agricultural programmes. The nation-wide compulsory castor and jatropha⁵ cultivation scheme, for example, for which the SPDC may be diverting the FAO funds has involved widespread forced labour and extortion, and aims to produce biofuel for military use. The United Nations Economic and Social Council for Asia Pacific (UNESCAP) has been supporting the SPDC in the development of the 'Asian Highway' – a transnational network of roads which, in Karen State, has involved land confiscation and the forced labour of local villagers, all without compensation. These are but some of the cases of the abuse perpetrated with the support of international aid agencies in the implementation of the junta's 'development' agenda. There are likely many more such cases, but the lack of transparency with which such agencies operate in Burma obstructs much of the investigation into their involvement with particular SPDC-controlled projects.

Whether initiated by the ruling SPDC or by external agencies, development programmes are inescapably political acts. If they are to take responsibility for the consequences of their actions, UN agencies, foreign governments, and international NGOs must recognise that they operate in a totalitarian environment where all intervention is political. This is not to state that any aid with political implications is automatically negative, but that engaging in aid processes while deliberately blinding oneself to and denying the political implications is almost always a recipe for disaster; for aid 'professionals' to do so goes beyond naïve and borders on criminal negligence.

Nevertheless the dilemma remains. On the one hand, the people of Burma have a right to humanitarian assistance. On the other hand, SPDC-implemented development programmes involve massive human rights abuses which undermine livelihoods, worsen health conditions and obstruct civilian attempts to address their own social and economic needs - effectively ensuring

⁵ In media statements referring to this project the SPDC has shifted between the terms 'castor', 'jatropha' and 'physic nut'. Castor and jatropha are technically distinct species, both of which are types of physic nut.

that the results are counterproductive to the very goals the projects allegedly aim to achieve. International assistance to development work inside Burma is surely needed to address the country's deplorable humanitarian situation. However, the ethical argument for providing foreign aid is unsound where such assistance is harmful to the population it aims to benefit and undermines their own efforts to ameliorate their situation. In order to ensure that such assistance is in any way beneficial to local peoples, it must be conditional, but not on regime change.⁶ Rather, international development assistance, whether for humanitarian or other programmes, must meet the requirements of transparency and accountability to the civilian population while furthermore ensuring that it does not undermine the rights of local peoples. The attempt by some international agencies to paint human rights organisations as 'anti-aid' may well be motivated primarily by a desire to evade these crucial issues. The manner in which the SPDC implements 'development' programmes makes these conditions difficult to achieve but of utmost importance. If these conditions are not met, however, international aid will fail by its own stated measures of success, in that it will exacerbate and perpetuate poverty and worsen the humanitarian crisis in Burma.

⁶ In fact, there are no organisations anywhere to KHRG's knowledge who insist on regime change as a condition for humanitarian aid in Burma, as the ICG's Brussels-based consultants erroneously imagined in their report.

Notes on the text

This report is based primarily on the testimony of villagers living throughout Karen State drawn out from over 90 interviews conducted between November 2005 and December 2006. In certain instances, the report also draws on earlier interviews conducted by KHRG where the context was consistent with the current situation. The methodological approach is one of qualitative over quantitative research in order to allow local villagers to speak for themselves about abuses, their effects and the implications on their lives and describe the manner in which they have responded to events. Quotes from villagers forced to live under the expanding system of militarised 'development' have been juxtaposed with SPDC statements taken from official media releases and press conferences. Further supportive information has been drawn, where appropriate, from academic and media articles as well as reports from governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental agencies.

Many of the place names mentioned in the report are indicated on the accompanying maps. Most districts, townships, villages and rivers have both a Karen and Burmese name. We have tried to be consistent throughout this report and favour the names preferred by local people. While districts are identified with Burmese names, their boundaries follow Karen designations as used by local people and the Karen National Union (KNU) but not the SPDC. Under SPDC designations, sections of western Nyaunglebin and Toungoo Districts fall within eastern Pegu (Bago) Division, while western Thaton and Dooplaya Districts form part of Mon State. Karen and Burmese names transliterated into English follow KHRG standards and may deviate from those used by other organisations as no convention has been universally adopted. Please note that KHRG revised our transliteration rules in October 2006 to make them more consistent and accurate, causing the spelling of many place names to change in our reports.

Terms and abbreviations

BSPP	Burma Socialist Programme Party
DFID	United Kingdom Department for International Development
DKBA	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Office
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
ILO	International Labour Organisation
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army
KNU	Karen National Union
KPF	Karen Peace Force
MMCWA	Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
MWAF	Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation
OPEC	Organisation of Oil Producing and Exporting Countries
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
TPDC	Township Peace and Development Council
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendant
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USDA	Union Solidarity and Development Association
VPDC	Village Peace and Development Council
WHO	World Health Organisation of the United Nations
kyat	Burmese currency; US \$1 equals 5.8 kyat at official rate, +/-1300 kyat at current market rate
<i>loh ah pay</i>	Forced labour; A Burmese term referring to voluntary service for temples or the local community, but not military or state projects
<i>set tha</i>	A Burmese term for forced labour duty as a messenger at army camps but also involves other tasks when no messages are in need of delivery
viss	Unit of weight measure; one viss equals 1.6 kg / 3.5 lb

Karen Districts



© Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), 2006

Burma



© Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), 2005

Scale: 1 to 800,000

II. Background

According to all standard economic and social indicators Burma is in a state of crisis. With widespread poverty, poor health standards and a void in social services the World Bank has labelled the country as a 'fragile state' and grouped it with nine others like Haiti and Liberia in the category of most severe 'Low-Income Countries under Stress'.⁷ According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in 2006 was US\$ 230, although this figure is most likely overstated as it relies, at least in part, on statistics provided by the SPDC.⁸ Recent measurements place average life expectancy at 56 years.⁹ According to the European Commission Humanitarian Office' (ECHO) Burma's "*Government expenditure on health per person is the lowest in the world*" while 34% of those living in rural areas lack access to clean water and 43% lack access to sanitation facilities.¹⁰ The British Government's Department for International Development (DFID) has estimated that the regime spends a mere 0.3% of GDP on education.¹¹ The country has furthermore been listed as having a 'least developed' economy ever since the military regime applied for this status in 1987.¹² Despite the stagnant economy and plummeting standard of living across the country, the SPDC has maintained a policy of devoting half of all State expenditure towards the military.¹³ The cumulative effect of these conditions, as one academic put it, is that "*Modern Burma... is widely considered to be Asia's principal development disaster.*"¹⁴

Despite economic instability, lack of infrastructure, a dual exchange rate and a poorly educated populace, transnational corporations and foreign governments have been eager to invest in the country. During fiscal year 2005-2006, foreign investment in Burma reached a record US\$ 6.065 billion, most of which was poured into extractive industries in the energy sector.¹⁵ This brought the total

⁷ *Engaging with Fragile States: An IEG Review of World Bank Support to Low-Income Countries Under Stress*, The World Bank, 2006.

⁸ *World Economic Outlook Database*, International Monetary Fund, September 2006.

⁹ "Burma/Myanmar: A silent crisis," ECHO, November 22nd 2005. Accessed at http://ec.europa.eu/echo/field/myanmar/index_en.htm on March 1st 2007.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ "Country Profiles: Burma," UK Department for International Development, October 4th 2005. Accessed at www.dfid.gov.uk/countries/asia/burma.asp on March 1st 2007.

¹² Booth, Anne. 2003. "The Burma Development Disaster in Comparative Historical Perspective," *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research* 1(1):1-23. pp.13

¹³ "134 MPs Demand Total Oil Withdraw From Burma," The Burma Campaign UK, July 14th 2005. Accessed at www.burmacampaign.org.uk/pm/more.php?id=175_0_1_0_M on March 1st 2007.

¹⁴ Booth, Anne. 2003. "The Burma Development Disaster in Comparative Historical Perspective," *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research* 1(1):1-23. pp.1

¹⁵ "Myanmar foreign investment in 2005-06 registers highest in 18 years," *Xinhua*, October 15th 2006. Accessed at http://english.people.com.cn/200610/15/eng20061015_311899.html on March 1st 2007. Note that this increased investment undermines the argument often put forward

contracted foreign investment in Burma to 13.917 billion dollars since the country opened up its markets in 1988.¹⁶ Nevertheless, economic analysts suggest that even these rising revenues will be insufficient to offset the constantly increasing military spending.¹⁷ As a result, the Asian Development Bank has dismissed the regime's projections of 12.2% economic growth in 2007 as "implausible".¹⁸ Moreover, inflation reached 24.9% in 2006¹⁹ and this trend is expected to continue.²⁰ In the face of rising inflation the junta has been steadfast in maintaining an official exchange rate of 5.8 kyat to the US dollar.²¹ This figure contrasts strikingly to the black market rate which hovers around 1300 kyat to the dollar.²²

These figures indicate that despite economic mismanagement, disregard for the wellbeing of the civilian population and rampant spending on the military the junta has nonetheless managed to garner increased revenue through foreign investment over the past 19 years. In addition, the regime has sought to justify its political, military and economic policies on the basis of a development model ostensibly divergent from the pre-1988 socialist period. Indeed, the junta has claimed that through "*proper evolution of the market-oriented economy*" the country has made "*unprecedented developments in the political, economic and social sectors [that] are the clear result of the endeavours.*"²³ Rather than a divergence from the politics of development practiced by the pre-1988 regime, however, contemporary State policy has deviated little from the earlier authoritarian development policy that had as its primary aim the consolidation of military control over an exploitable civilian population. Official ownership of all land remains with the State, which also continues to control trade and movement of most goods, decrees what crops farmers are allowed to grow and when, and rigidly controls civilians' every movement.

Evolution of Burma's development politics

Notwithstanding the destruction wrought during World War Two, Burma emerged as an independent nation in 1948 still widely seen as the 'rice bowl' of

that "sanctions haven't worked" to reform the regime; it could more accurately be argued that "increased investment hasn't worked".

¹⁶ "Vietnam to invest in Myanmar's special economic zone," *Xinhua*, February 1st 2007. Accessed at www.burmanet.org/news/2007/02/01/xinhua-general-news-service-vietnam-to-invest-in-myanmars-special-economic-zone/ on February 2nd 2007.

¹⁷ *Asian Development Outlook 2005*, Asian Development Bank, 2005

¹⁸ "Cambodia, Laos, Burma prone to fail, says World Bank," *Asia Pulse*, January 8th 2007. Accessed at www.burmanet.org/news/2007/01/08/asia-pulse-cambodia-laos-burma-prone-to-fail-says-world-bank on February 7th 2007.

¹⁹ *World Economic Outlook Database*, International Monetary Fund, September 2006.

²⁰ *Asian Development Outlook 2005*, Asian Development Bank, 2005

²¹ "The Economic Outlook," *The Irrawaddy*, January 19th 2007. Accessed at www.irrawaddy.org/aviewer.asp?a=597&z=109 on January 19th 2007.

²² *The Irrawaddy*, January 19th 2007. Accessed at www.irrawaddy.org on January 19th 2007.

²³ "The danger posed to democratic revolution," *The Myanmar Times and Business Review*, February 21st -27th 2005. Accessed at www.myanmar.com/myanmartimes/MyanmarTimes13-255/n016.htm on January 19th 2007.

Asia. Both domestic and international analysts expected that living standards would soon regain their relatively high pre-war levels. The country's abundant natural resources and economic surplus, no longer subject to colonial exploitation, led observers to expect that "*economic prosperity would be a corollary of independence.*"²⁴ The high level of literacy furthermore augured well for the post-independence economy. U Nu, the country's first Prime Minister, claimed in 1952 that it would not be long before all families in Burma possessed a car.²⁵

Despite the economic prospects of the newly independent state, the early government lacked popular legitimacy outside the dominant ethnic Burmans, who made up an estimated 50-60% of the population. Ethnic resistance to the new government's nation building was immediate. The ethnic opposition took up arms in resistance to the new regime's campaign of domination and assimilation. The Karen armed resistance emerged in 1949 and gradually consolidated into the present day Karen National Union. In the context of growing ethnic opposition and a large communist insurgency, a military junta under the authority of Ne Win took power from the U Nu government initially in 1958 and then again in 1962. In both instances, the junta stated an explicit frustration with the parliamentary system of government that had been in operation since the country's independence. Following the 1962 coup, the Revolutionary Council, in a document entitled *The Burmese Way to Socialism*, stated it did "*not believe that man will be set free from social evils as long as pernicious economic systems exist in which man exploits man and lives on the fat of such appropriation.*"²⁶ Despite such rhetoric, the reform measures subsequently introduced gave the lie to any claims about ending exploitation.

As an alternative to the preceding political and economic system, the new junta, later adopting the name Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), embarked on a process of regime consolidation based on a more centrally-planned economy involving large-scale nationalisation of foreign owned firms and self-imposed isolation. The Ne Win regime discouraged domestic production of export-oriented goods and focused instead on a stated goal of self-sufficiency depending heavily on agriculture.²⁷ The manner in which these goals were implemented involved what later scholars have termed "*a policy of agricultural exploitation*" which functioned on the basis of "*the procurement system, the planned cropping system and the state ownership of farmland.*"²⁸ In this way the junta worked to bolster the structures of military rule through the

²⁴ Stifel, Laurence D. 1972, "Burmese Socialism: Economic Problems of the First Decade," *Pacific Affairs* 45(1):60-74. pp.60

²⁵ Walinsky, Louis J. 1963. "Economic Development in Burma 1951-1960," *American Economic Review* 53(4):780-781. pp.780

²⁶ *The Burmese Way to Socialism*, Revolutionary Council, April 28th 1962. Accessed at www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/The_Burmese_Way_to_Socialism.htm on October 11th 2006.

²⁷ Booth, Anne. 2003. "The Burma Development Disaster in Comparative Historical Perspective," *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research* 1(1):1-23. pp.5

²⁸ Fujita and Ikuku, "Agricultural Policies and Development of Myanmar's Agricultural Sector: An Overview", *IDE Discussion Paper*, No. 63, July 2006. pp.4

appropriation of the economic surplus of the agricultural sector, which has historically dominated Burma's economy and in the early 1960s made up 40 percent of GDP.²⁹ With the primary goal of shoring up military power, development policies under Ne Win were short-sighted, poorly thought out, top-down initiatives which disregarded local concerns. As a consequence, Burma fell from being one of the most prosperous nations in Asia to being one of the poorest, and it was only the large black-market economy built on illegal trade with China, Bangladesh and Thailand that was able to sustain the economy.³⁰

Following the popular protests and political turbulence of 1988 – largely underpinned by frustration over widespread economic stagnation – and the ensuing military shuffle, the emerging junta, under the name State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), adopted an economic model which seemingly deviated radically from the stated ideology of the preceding BSPP. Abandoning all reference to socialism, SLORC initiated sweeping reforms of economic liberalisation; effectively re-opening the economy to foreign investment.³¹ SLORC's promulgation of the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Law in late 1988 lay down the framework for transnational corporate engagement in Burma.³² Under the FDI law, the Myanmar Investment Commission allows foreign 'interests' to invest in Burma with a minimum \$500,000 in the manufacturing sector and \$300,000 in the service sector.³³

Despite the apparent changes in economic policy the new military junta, under both its SLORC and post-1997 SPDC appellations, has maintained the policy of economic exploitation introduced under the BSPP. Following this model, the regime has sought to construct a vision of society in which the civilian population labours in support of the hierarchical structures of military power. Moreover, contrary to the concepts of 'open market competition', any prosperity there has been since the implementation of economic reforms has depended on either formal or informal linkages with the ruling military. Large firms proving financially beneficial to the junta are allowed to operate freely either with state 'licences' or in joint military-business ventures, while small-scale industry and subsistence agriculture are severely restricted.³⁴ Both, however, are exploited

²⁹ Booth, Anne. 2003. "The Burma Development Disaster in Comparative Historical Perspective," *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research* 1(1):1-23. pp. 5

³⁰ Khin Maung Kyi, *Economic Development of Burma: A vision and strategy*, Singapore University Press, 2000. pp.12

³¹ Steinberg, David I. 1990. "International Rivalries in Burma: The Rise of Economic Competition," *Asian Survey* 30(6):587-601. pp. 587

³² "Myanmar foreign investment in 2005-06 registers highest in 18 years," *Xinhua*, October 15th 2006. Accessed at http://english.people.com.cn/200610/15/eng20061015_311899.html on February 7th 2007.

³³ "Thai investment in dam project would nearly double FDI," *The Myanmar Times and Business Review*, September 11th-17th 2006. Accessed at www.myanmar.com/myanmartimes/MyanmarTimes17-333/n005.htm on January 30th 2007.

³⁴ Nancy Hudson-Rodd and Myo Nyunt. April 2001. "Control of Land and Life in Burma," *Tenure Brief* No. 3:1-8. Land Tenure Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Accessed at http://agecon.lib.umn.edu/cgi-bin/pdf_view.pl?paperid=2580&ftype=.pdf on March 1st 2007.

to support the broader structures of military power and the private gains of individual military officers. Development initiatives are implemented by fiat; the concerns of local-level actors are ignored and any economic surplus is siphoned off by, and in support of, military personnel.

In the face of such systematic cronyism and exploitation, the SPDC has been wary of popular unrest. Given the junta's lack of democratic legitimacy, the military has sought to justify its continued rule by appeals to national unity and economic development. In relation to the former, the SPDC has propounded *ad nauseam* on the danger of insurgents and terrorists who threaten to tear the country asunder. Regarding the latter, state-controlled media carry daily pronouncements regarding the many invaluable 'development' programmes implemented via military structures across the country. The regime is therefore in the contradictory position of exploiting the wider populace while presenting such behaviour to both local and international audiences as not only benign, but even beneficial to the very individuals and communities who suffer the consequences.

In rural non-Burman dominated areas, referred to by the SPDC with geographical inaccuracy as 'border' areas in an apparent effort to increase their marginalisation, such rhetoric presents local peoples as benefiting from SPDC military intervention, despite evidence that the construction of roads, schools and dams or the various agricultural initiatives nonetheless involve regular, often violent, coercion and human rights abuse in their implementation and systematically undermine the capacities of local villagers to resist military repression and claim their rights. Vague SPDC statements regarding the situation in rural non-Burman areas, such as that quoted below, are common.

"The border areas development projects have been implemented with increased efforts and have come to fruition since the Tatmadaw [Armed Forces] assumed State duties. The social and economic sectors of local people in border areas have made considerable progress more than expected if compared with those before the projects."

- Colonel Thein Nyunt, SPDC Minister for Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs (April 2006)³⁵

The pattern of development policy under military rule in Burma, whether implemented by the BSPP, SLORC or SPDC, has functioned to further a two-fold purpose of bolstering military rule and minimising popular social unrest. Initiated through formal state-level decrees or the arbitrary commands of local officers, such policy measures have consistently disregarded the impacts of their implementation on the local community. Consequently, negative environmental, cultural, social and humanitarian fallout is standard. As the civilian population realises the detrimental effects of SPDC development programmes, military personnel depend on abuse to enforce compliance.

³⁵ "Questions and answers at the Press Conference 4/2006," SPDC Press Conference, April 27th 2006. Accessed at www.myanmar.com/pressconference/index.html on February 7th 2007.

Particular violations which further the implementation of development initiatives include land confiscation without compensation or right to appeal, destruction of property, forced relocation, extortion and forced labour. Furthermore, other particularly violent abuses are regularly employed. Villagers in Karen areas regularly face torture, rape, killing and the deployment of landmines as soldiers seek to eradicate even the most subtle forms of non-violent resistance or non-cooperation. Such abuse has become a necessary part of implementing development policies aimed at expanding and consolidating military control over a civilian population seeking to maintain its livelihood despite the systematic oppression under which it lives.

III. Development Projects and Related Abuses

Roads

“Only when roads in rural areas are in good condition, will living standards of rural people improve.”

– SPDC Senior General Than Shwe (Oct 2006)³⁶

“This car road has no benefit for me because to construct the road so many of the villagers’ plantations and crops were ruined. All of the plants and trees were forced to be cut down. Some of the trees and plants were cut down by the villagers themselves because they were forced to do so. But some were cut down by SPDC themselves.”

– Saw W--- (male, 26), S--- village, Toungoo District (2006)

Official SPDC statements on rural infrastructure given in press conferences and media statements stress the importance of roads in rural areas for the ‘uplift’ of the people and the ‘development of the Union’. The assertion is that the outcome of extending and multiplying roads in these regions will be an improvement in the living standards of local peoples. A January 2007 statement by Senior General Than Shwe, reprinted in *The New Light of Myanmar*, exemplifies this position:

“Smooth transportation plays a major role in the drive for national development. So, it is expediting the building of social and economic infrastructures day in, day out such as village-to-village roads, highways, and river or creek-spanning bridges, extension of railroads, expansion of port development work, and upgrading of airports. It is not only for ensuring national development but also for building social infrastructures to cement amicable relations among the national races of the Union.”³⁷

While improved access to trade, easier travel and more efficient communication – corollaries to be expected from a more extensive network of roadways – could plausibly bring tangible benefits to local villagers, these are not the outcomes described by those affected. Rather, villagers living in rural areas of Karen State speak of systematic abuse perpetrated by SPDC and DKBA forces in conjunction with an invasive programme of road construction and of the resulting subjugation of the civilian population where their strategies to evade and resist abuse are obstructed by increased military control over their lives and land.

³⁶ Quoted in “Development of a country depends on progress of rural areas, and development of urban areas are underpinned by economic infrastructures in rural areas Senior General Than Shwe attends Meeting No 1/2006 of Central Committee for Development of Border Areas and National Races,” *The New Light of Myanmar*, October 4th 2006.

³⁷ Than Shwe, “Powerful countries interfering [sic] in internal affairs of others Young generation are duty-bound to safeguard independence and sovereignty,” *New Light of Myanmar*, January 4th 2007.

Direct abuses in road construction

“Moreover, all-weather roads were constructed in some major areas to connect border areas and inland regions. Therefore, trade between the regions has increased and rural areas are on the road to development.”

– SPDC Senior General Than Shwe (Oct 2006)³⁸

“In December [2005], SPDC LID [Light Infantry Division] #44 Division Commander Zin Min Htun ordered L--- villagers to fix the road. This road starts at Kyaik Khaw and continues to Yaw Shan village. The villagers have to fix this road every year. This year they ordered L--- villagers to repair the road from L--- to N---. It took us four days to finish fixing the road. Each day 40 villagers went to work on the road. Even though the villagers worked for the SPDC, they had to take their own food because they were not given any. The SPDC also didn’t give them any money.”

– Saw M--- (Male, 42), L--- village, Thaton (January 2006)

Those who suffer first from the SPDC’s road building programme are the civilians already living under military control residing nearby, who must serve as porters, messengers and guides for patrols as soldiers encroach further into rural areas, blazing proposed roadways and setting up new camps. Local villagers must also provide food and supplies for these troops. They are given no compensation in return and threatened against non-compliance. As the proposed routes of the new roadways are established, military forces confiscate villagers’ land either for the construction of the road itself or for further military camps and bases along the way which they claim are needed to protect the roads and the recently confiscated land. Villagers are often not even informed that their land is to be confiscated until a bulldozer arrives. No money is ever offered or paid for the land, nor do villagers have access to any means of appeal against the decree.

Although the SPDC has been expanding its networks of roadways throughout Karen State, one example of such construction from Papun District is illustrative of the destruction these projects leave in their wake. Starting in January 2005, LIB #434 led by battalion commander Tun Tun On organised the reconstruction of the Papun town to Ka Ka Maung car road which roughly follows the Yunzalin River as it flows south to meet up with the Salween. The construction process initially involved levelling the route with stones and then paving it over with tar. In the process of collecting stones for the project, soldiers destroyed villagers’ irrigation dykes which diverted water into their rice fields and partially dismantled the Bilin river dam which controlled irrigation for the whole area. The soldiers then heaped the river stones into piles atop villagers’ farm fields

³⁸ Quoted in “Development of a country depends on progress of rural areas, and development of urban areas are underpinned by economic infrastructures in rural areas Senior General Than Shwe attends Meeting No 1/2006 of Central Committee for Development of Border Areas and National Races,” *The New Light of Myanmar*, October 4th 2006.

from where they were to be transported to the roadways. In response, one villager complained that, *"In previous years, they piled stones in our flat fields and then didn't take all the stones, so when we prepared the field for planting we had to remove all the stones they had left before we could plough. If we hadn't done that we could not have used the field for planting. Now we worry that our irrigated flat rice fields will be destroyed, and we know that the soldiers are never going to repair this damage for us."* The SPDC then brought in bulldozers with which they ploughed a new route directly through rice fields around the areas of Ma Htaw and Ku Seik. By destroying the rice fields, irrigation dykes and dams around the Papun to Ka Ka Maung car road, the SPDC military pretty much ensured that villagers in the area would face a food shortage.³⁹



On March 15th 2005 troops from SPDC Light Infantry Battalion #341 (Saw Myint Thauang commanding) began work improving the Ka Ma Maung – Papun vehicle road in the Ma Htaw – Ku Seik area. They gathered stones from the riverbanks as well as stones from the villagers' irrigation dams and dykes and stones lining irrigation canals, thus destroying the irrigation system for many ricefields. They then piled these stones in the middle of the villagers' ricefields near Khaw Klah village, as seen in the above photo. When these photos were taken in July 2005 rainy season had already begun and it was planting time, but the troops still had not come to take away the stones. The villagers were in a dilemma, needing to remove the stones to plant their fields but afraid of punishment should the soldiers return and find the stones moved. [Photo: KHRG]

³⁹ For more information on the construction of the Papun to Ka Ma Maung car road see *Papun District: Forced Labour, Looting and Road Construction in SPDC-Controlled Areas*, (Karen Human Rights Group, May 2005).

When Army bulldozers arrive, they indiscriminately destroy agricultural fields, irrigation canals, fruit plantations, villages and pasture land lying in the way. In some cases villagers are called out to clear the route, dig ditches, break rocks and build the road by hand so that local Army officers can sell the bulldozer fuel for personal profit; or the village heads are given the option of having their villagers do the work by hand or 'renting' the bulldozer and paying for the fuel. In other cases there is no bulldozer at all, and the work is all done by hand. Soldiers force local villagers, including women, children and the elderly, to build roads over what were previously their own lands and use stones taken from irrigation dikes that feed their paddy fields.

"Thirty paddy fields will be destroyed. Some of our paddy fields and irrigation canals were already destroyed by their road construction in 2003 and 2004. Some of those fields we could no longer use and others we had to rebuild. Some of the villagers had to sell their livestock in order to hire people to come and rebuild the paddy fields for them."

– Saw H--- (male), Y--- village, Papun District (Dec 2005)

"Females do more 'loh ah pay'⁴⁰ [forced labour] than males, such as cutting and clearing roads or carrying thatch, bananas or coconuts. But males still do the heavy work. We must do the work that they demand of us."

– Naw M--- (female, 35), K--- village, Papun District (March 2006)

Military units exploit the forced labour of villagers in order to construct these roads despite the SPDC's issuance in 1999 of Order 1/99 which explicitly bans most forms of forced labour, followed by two decrees in 2000 which expanded this ban and declared criminal penalties for anyone requisitioning forced labour.⁴¹ Village and village tract heads in many areas of Karen State have obtained copies of this order but when they have appealed to local army officers on the grounds that forced labour is illegal, they have been told, *"Don't show us this. We don't understand about this, so you have to go and show it to our superior leaders."*⁴² Village heads are reticent to petition high level officials often residing in distant towns as they are sceptical of any action being taken and fear retaliation by local army officers should they make such complaints. Their reticence appears justified, given that the SPDC has yet to allow a single Army officer anywhere in Burma to be charged with demanding forced labour despite having decreed criminal penalties for doing so since 2000.⁴³ Forced

⁴⁰ 'Loh Ah Pay' is a Burmese term originally meaning voluntary service in the construction of temples and other community buildings. The SPDC uses the term when demanding uncompensated labour. For villagers the term has come to mean most forms of forced labour.

⁴¹ See *Forced Labour Orders Since the Ban* (Karen Human Rights Group, February 2002), Appendix B.

⁴² Quoted in *Eastern Pa'an District: Forced Labour, Food Security and the Consolidation of Control*, (Karen Human Rights Group, May 2004).

⁴³ There have been a total of 10 or 20 cases lodged nationally during this entire time but they were all against civilian officials; the SPDC will not allow a military officer to be charged despite the fact that they order most of the forced labour. Although the SPDC agreed to a new ILO mechanism in March 2007 that would allow civilians to submit complaints regarding forced

labour in road construction thus continues unabated, with villagers furthermore required to supply their own food, water and whatever tools are necessary.

“Last April [2006]... our villagers went to construct a road from Kawkareik to Thay Pun. Every household there had to go. We had to carry sand, mud and stones and fill in the holes on the road. We had to do this for many days. The Village Peace and Development Council chairperson ordered us to go. We didn’t get any wages; we had to do it for free and [they] did not supply food for us. Every village which was situated beside Kawkareik town had to go to do road construction.”

– Daw N--- (female, 45), D--- village, Doooplaya District (June 2006)

Such labour also involves the risk of encountering landmines, attacks by resistance forces targeting SPDC personnel, or physical abuse and rape by the soldiers and officers overseeing the road construction. Indeed, soldiers often employ civilians as human shields to protect trucks and larger equipment from ambushes or send them ahead to sweep for landmines – a process known as ‘human minesweeping’ or ‘atrocities de-mining’.

“In 2003 and 2004 when they built roads the Karen soldiers did not attack them, but they forced us to clear the scrub along both sides of the car road [a defensive measure against ambush]. Also, three or four villagers had to go with their bulldozer every single day. We didn’t have time to rest, and they did not pay us anything either. Some of our paddy fields and canals were destroyed, but they did not rebuild them for us. We had to rebuild all of them by ourselves.”

– Saw T--- (male), village head, K--- village, Papun District (Jan 2006)

“He [SPDC LID #66 Commander Maung Maung Aye] demanded one person from each household from Maw Pah Der village to accompany the bulldozers. Three people had to ride on the bulldozers, five people had to walk along the left side, five people had to walk along the right side and the other people followed behind and walk in front of bulldozers. The SPDC army has been coming to build a new camp in Wa Thoe Koh and has already confiscated five acres of the villagers’ land.”

- KHRG field researcher, Toungoo District (February 2007)

labour, restrictions on ILO staff and civilians in rural areas along with inadequate means of ensuring protection for complainants prevent such a mechanism from actually being implemented in Karen areas.



A section of the Kyaik Khaw - Ka Ma Maung road which villagers are being forced to build from Thaton District to southern Papun District, shown here in late February 2006. This segment lies between T'Kaw Bo and Meh Bpu villages. The photo below shows villagers doing forced labour digging a drainage ditch which will run alongside the road; women, men and children have all been forced to do this work to meet deadlines set by the SPDC. *[Photos: KHRG]*



"In the dry season, the villagers are forced to do 'loh ah pay' [forced labour] to clear [the sides of] the Mawchi car road to Kayah [Karen State] every year by the SPDC. Every month in the dry season the SPDC orders one person from each house in most villages to go, but Kler La is a big village so the SPDC asks for whatever number of people they want - they ask for at least 30-40 people at a time from Kler La. After I came back to my village for the holidays, I heard that people stepped on SPDC landmines when they were clearing the car road for the SPDC. It takes weeks to finish clearing [the sides of] the car road. The villagers have to bring their own food and they are not paid."

– Saw E--- (male, 17), K--- village, Toungoo District (April 2006)

Aside from the initial construction civilians living nearby are forced to do annual road maintenance and to rebuild those sections washed away by seasonal rains. Bushes and new growth along roadsides must be cut back as a preventive measure against 'ambushes' but also to make it more difficult for individual villagers, families or communities trying to cross these roads in their evasion of military forces without being spotted.

"LIB #104, led by battalion commander Aye Aung, came and settled in the Ta Paw Army camp. On December 10th 2005 they forced the villagers of K--- village to cut and clear the road. They order the villagers to cut and clear the road three times a year. It takes three days to finish cutting and clearing the road."

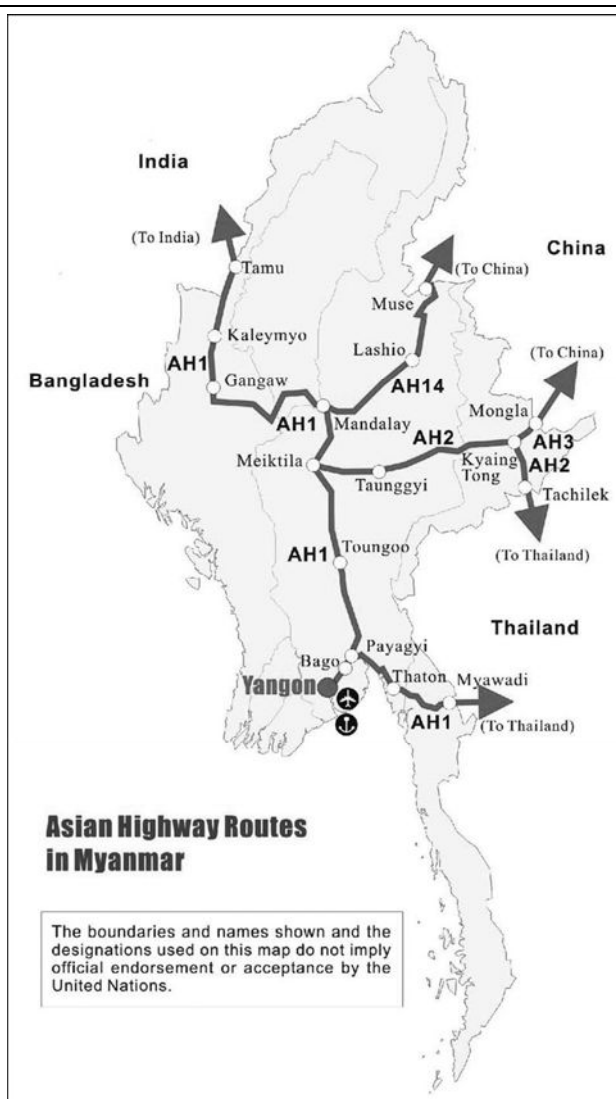
– Naw M--- (Female, 46), village head, K--- village, Thaton District (Feb 2006)

A KHRG field researcher, gave the following account of an example of forced labour on road construction in Bilin township of Thaton District during December 2005:

"SPDC Division #44 Division Commander Zin Min Htun ordered Bilin villagers to construct a road for them. This road started from Kyet Kaw Thay Zay and went to Shan village. The villagers have to fix this road every year. This year they ordered Bilin villagers to start fixing the road from Bilin to Naw Ghaw Kloh. The villagers of Ler Kloh had to work from Naw Ghaw Kloh to Thoo Lu. The rest of the villages had to do the rest of the way as well. It took four days for the Bilin villagers to reach Naw Ghaw Kloh and for each day 40 of the villagers had to fix the road. The SPDC neither gives food nor pays money to the villagers who work for them. The villagers must bring their own food to eat."

Although the SPDC implements their programme of road construction throughout Karen State, one particularly high-profile case is the construction of the Asian Highway through Pa'an and Thaton Districts. The SPDC has been constructing this highway, which is intended to link Burma with 31 other countries in Asia along a network of 140,479 kilometres of roads, in partnership with UNESCAP, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.⁴⁴ When complete, the Burma segment of the Asian Highway is slated to enter from Thailand via the border town of Myawaddy in Pa'an District, on through Thaton District and then continue northwest around the Gulf of Martaban to Rangoon. In Thaton District, the SPDC has been increasingly employing the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) as a proxy to take control of the civilian population and implement development projects, including the Asian Highway.

In carrying out construction of the Asian Highway, the DKBA has confiscated farm fields belonging to local villagers and forced them to clear the land, construct the road and dig irrigation ditches alongside while paying them nothing in return.



Proposed routes through Burma of the Asian Highway - a transnational network of roads being developed by State authorities under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. [Source: UNESCAP]

⁴⁴ *Asian Highway*, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. Accessed at www.unescap.org/ttdw/Publications/TIS_pubs/pub_2303/intro%20ah.pdf on January 5th 2007.



This dirt track marks the route of the planned Asian Highway, as it was being developed in late 2006, which is to cross through Thaton District. The section of roadway shown here was built over rice fields belonging to 60-year-old U M--- of Bee Lin Kyo village who was given no compensation for the loss of his land. Local villagers were forced to construct both the road and the drainage ditches running alongside. *[Photo: KHRG; disregard incorrect date printed on the photo]*

“Since November 10th 2005 the DKBA commander of Brigade 333, named Maung Kyee, has ordered the villagers of Noh M’Kwee and the other villages surrounding Noh M’Kwee to construct the road which goes from Wuh Boh Taw to Noh M’Kwee. In 2005, they [the soldiers] ordered the villagers once, but it was harvest time so they ordered the villagers again to do it on January 20th 2006. This time they gave an order that every village has to do it. In fact, the SPDC paid them [the DKBA] 1,000,000 kyat to build the road, but the DKBA forced the villagers without paying them anything. The DKBA didn’t give the villagers tools to dig the road. They must bring their own tools to dig and their own food to eat as well. The DKBA said they planned to construct a highway. It has already taken five months, but the villagers have only finished doing a little of it.”

– Saw L--- (male, 50), village head, N--- village, Thaton District (Jan 2006)

Rural roadways and military control

“The current biggest problem is food, because the SPDC soldiers have closed the road and we are not allowed to buy food from the town or to go outside the village. If the situation remains the same we will have problems with food in the coming year.”

– Naw S--- (female, 43), K--- village, Toungoo District (2006)

Beyond the direct abuses perpetrated in the establishment and construction of new roads in Karen State, these corridors make possible further SPDC and DKBA encroachment into areas previously outside their control. New roads are soon followed by new Army camps along those roads, and the two become mutually reinforcing: the roads are used to deploy troops and supplies to the camps, and the soldiers in those camps guard and further extend the roads. Each new Army camp radiates state control – and its associated forced labour, extortion, land confiscation and resource extraction – to the surrounding area. Meanwhile, villagers cannot use the roads without ‘running the gauntlet’ of military checkpoints every couple of kilometres, where they are checked for movement passes, robbed of bribe money to pass, and sometimes detained for *ad hoc* forced labour.

The SPDC has used satellite camps built along the expanding network of roads as launch points from where soldiers can easily locate civilians attempting to evade military rule, attack their hiding sites and force them into military-controlled villages and relocation sites along the roads. In such cases villagers, aware of the subjugation and exploitation of life under direct military rule, often flee further into the forest or else head across the border to refugee camps in Thailand.

“We don’t know whether these two roads will have any benefit to us or not, but we are worried and troubled a lot because of these two roads. We can’t stay in our village and can’t travel freely or peacefully. They will still send more trucks to construct the road as usual.”

– Saw B--- (male, 32), B--- village, Toungoo District (2006)

Villagers utilise evasion as a means of resisting the demands for forced labour in the construction of the roadways. By fleeing into the surrounding forest or countryside on the approach of military patrols villagers are able to avoid conscription, leaving soldiers unable to detain the necessary number of labourers. Alternatively, where SPDC officials place demands for this labour through the village head, these individuals are occasionally able to negotiate with local military officers for a reduction in demands by understating the village population or citing their community’s other work commitments. On top of this village communities employ other subtle methods of non-compliance by, for example, sending their least productive members to fill forced labour quotas on road construction, foot dragging, carrying out faulty workmanship and exploiting any opportunity to cut short time spent on such projects. Notwithstanding the possible gains of negotiations or other strategies of non-compliance, many

communities have chosen to avoid these military forces altogether by living at hiding sites in the forest beyond the reach of SPDC authorities.

With these new roads military businesses can also more easily exploit natural resources, logging forests and damming rivers with no accountability to, or input from, the affected communities and providing no compensation. Officers resell land confiscated from villagers as plantation fields to unscrupulous business interests, or keep them as military-run operations and then force villagers to labour on their former fields. All of these measures serve to strengthen military control over civilian lives while simultaneously undermining their livelihoods and means of resisting abuse. This cycle then continues as military patrols set out from the new roads, camps and bases to attack the remaining civilian presence residing in areas beyond military rule while bringing more land under SPDC control.

In eastern Papun District, the rampant construction since 2006 of new roads and military camps throughout areas previously outside SPDC control appears to be motivated at least in part by the need to secure the area around the sites of the proposed Weh Gyi and Dagwin hydroelectric dams to be built by the SPDC on the Salween River in partnership with Thailand. In December 2006, SPDC IB #8, following the orders of the Operations Commander based at Papun town began arranging for the construction of three new roads linking Kaw Boke (Kaw Pu) to the dam sites along the Salween. The first of these ran north along a pre-existing route to Kyauk Nyat, the site of the proposed Wei Gyi dam. The second road ran northeast to an SPDC camp located along the Salween at the site of the proposed Dagwin dam. The third roadway ran southeast through Paw Hta village and on to the SPDC camp at Maw Moh Kyo along the Salween. At a meeting at Kaw Pu army camp to which the village heads of Paw Hta, Oh Kaw and Hto Mo Pwa Der were summoned, an officer from IB #8 informed the villagers of the impending road construction. At this time one of the village heads replied, "*Commander, if you build this road some of our paddy*



Map of eastern Papun District with new roads the SPDC has been constructing in support of the planned Weh Gyi and Dagwin dams. The route of these roads runs indiscriminately through the farm fields of local villagers. [Map: KHRG]

fields and other plantations will be destroyed." The commander answered, *"I don't know if your paddy-fields or plantations will be destroyed. This order comes from our higher leaders, and three other countries are also working together on this project."* He did not specify which *"three other countries"*, though he may have meant partner Thailand and potential funders China and Japan.⁴⁵



The truck shown above (left) was one of a larger convoy used by a company local villagers name as the 'Htay company' which is logging in Law Kaw Htee village tract of Dweh Loh township, Papun District under a logging concession with the SPDC. The company is from outside the region, and local villagers say they were not consulted about the logging and have received no benefits whatsoever in terms of jobs or compensation; the logs are simply cut, hauled out of the area and sold elsewhere. The photo on the right shows some of the damage caused by the indiscriminate logging in Law Kaw Htee village tract. [Photo: KHRG]

SPDC restrictions on travel along roads further belie the claim that the primary goal of road construction is to provide improved travel and communication between communities. Soldiers confine forcibly-displaced villagers to relocation sites – often nothing more than barren internment camps – situated along the burgeoning network of roadways where they are penned in by fences which the soldiers force them to construct. For any travel outside of these sites villagers require passes issued by local SPDC or DKBA officers. To procure these passes, which typically expire in less than a few days, villagers must pay arbitrary 'fees' to local officers.

"Along the way [to Yoh Klah village], there are some toll gates that we must pass through. They are at Hta Bpaw, Bp'Nweh Klah, Lay Gkay and Yoh Klah. They [the SPDC soldiers] don't collect the taxes from the passengers, they collect them from the truck drivers. If any of the passengers don't have travel passes, they will be in trouble. To get a travel pass we must pay 200 kyat. We don't have freedom to do our work and we must travel in fear of them [the soldiers]."

– Naw K--- (female, 50), K--- village, Thaton District (July 2006)

⁴⁵ For more information on these road construction projects see *SPDC road construction plans creating problems for civilians*, (Karen Human Rights Group, January 2006).



The above photo shows the fence around Plaw Law Bler relocation site which SPDC soldiers forced the relocated villagers residing there to construct. Such fences allow soldiers to more easily control the movement of civilians and detain them within designated confines. [Photo: KHRG; ignore incorrect date printed on the photo]

During the brief period of their validity, villagers may use these passes in an attempt to return to their former fields to tend or harvest crops. Soldiers, however, often mine civilian fields, villages and pathways in order to prevent such a return. In some areas SPDC and DKBA soldiers maintain a shoot on sight policy whereby they target anyone seen regardless of their identity, reason for travelling or possession of travel documents. As a consequence of SPDC restrictions on movement crops remain only intermittently tended, if at all, leaving them in danger of consumption by animals and insects or being overgrown with weeds.

"In doing their occupation, the villagers have to face so many difficulties and problems. Most of the difficulties and problems that they have faced are because of the SPDC. They don't allow the villagers to stay overnight in their fields and the villagers have to get permission documents if they are going to travel. The villagers have to inform them if they want to go somewhere. The insects also destroy the paddy a lot and most of the time the villagers don't dare to go to their fields to look after their crops because the SPDC has planted landmines."

– Saw E--- (male, 22), G--- village, Toungoo District (2006)

"The SPDC didn't come to our village this year but they arrived at Day Loh river. They planted landmines and destroyed bridges so that villagers can't cross to the other side of the river to buy and sell food."

– Saw N--- (male, 58), L--- village, Toungoo District (Jan 2006)



The dry season vehicle road between Kya In Seik Gyi and Kyone Doh in western Dooplaya, seen here in June 2006. Villagers using this road must pay 'fees' at a number of SPDC and DKBA checkpoints in order to pass. The fees are particularly heavy for vehicles or carts carrying goods, which local villagers say stifles all trade in the region.

In areas where the SPDC is confident enough of its control that villagers are allowed limited movement and trade along the roads, regular tax gates run by SPDC and DKBA soldiers charging arbitrary and excessive fees on those carrying food or other supplies stifle trade, create additional barriers to villagers' basic livelihood and undermine the very living conditions the SPDC claims to be promoting. At every road and river checkpoint money must be paid in order to pass, and very high amounts are demanded of anyone carrying trade quantities of goods. In some cases roadblocks effectively bar all civilian travel and thereby obstruct access to medicine, food and other trade items. The arbitrary and excessive 'taxes' demanded at these tollgates undermine the gains from trade between the villages and towns, thereby killing the rural economy. Whatever claims the SPDC makes about the purpose of road development in rural areas of Karen State, the military encroachment that underlies these projects signals for local villagers nothing but heightened extortion, restrictions and abuse.

"We are afraid that the SPDC can capture us. We must always hurry. We sold our cardamom quickly and hurried to come back because we

didn't dare face the SPDC... This year, 2006, the SPDC blocked the car road so we found it difficult to buy our main foods such as rice, fish-paste and oil. They blocked the car road starting from Taw Oo [Toungoo] down to Kaw Thay Der. The cars couldn't carry rice, salt and fish-paste."

– Naw E--- (female, 35), L--- village, Toungoo District (April 2006)

"We need to buy goods from Mudon and along the way there are four SPDC checkpoints, one DKBA checkpoint and one of the KPF. From Mudon to our village costs about 15,000 kyat in checkpoint fees. A truck carrying wood charcoal or rubber has to pay at least 50,000 kyat in fees."

– Saw S--- (male, 58), P--- village, Dooplaya District (Jan 2006)

"We buy rice and other food from [Kya-In] Seik Gyi. We buy a basket of rice for 5,000 kyat, but we have to pay an additional car fare of 200 kyat per basket. The SPDC set up a gate along the way where we have to pay 100-200 kyat tax for every sack of rice."

– U B--- (male, 61), T---village, Dooplaya District (Jan 2006)

Dams

"As the electricity output from the [Hat Gyi dam] project is so great, we're trying to get the project finished as soon as we can. The project can supply half of [Burma's] total consumption so we're targeting the project to finish in December 2008."

– SPDC official, Ministry of Electric Power 1 (Sep 2006)⁴⁶

"We heard about the SPDC construction of the dam, but we don't agree with it. Our leaders have suggested that we pray hard so that God will listen to our prayers. All of the villagers hope that the SPDC will fail to do it. If they succeed in doing it, we will be in big trouble and we will face many problems. The SPDC has also said that they would like to help the villagers by giving them electricity. They said that if they succeeded in constructing the dam, they would give the villagers electricity. But I don't trust that they would really do as they have said and I don't want to take anything from them."

– Saw N--- (male, 19), K--- village, Toungoo District (April 2006)

In recent years local community-based organisations and regional activist groups have managed to call attention to the atrocities and subsequent environmental, social and cultural fallout commensurate with the development of four large-scale hydroelectric dams – the Tasang dam in southern Shan State and the Weh Gyi, Dagwin and Hat Gyi in eastern Karen State – proposed

⁴⁶ "Hutgyi power plant moves downstream to raise output," *The Myanmar Times and Business Review*, September 18th-22nd 2006. Accessed at www.myanmar.com/myanmartimes/MyanmarTimes17-334/b003.htm on January 30th 2007.

for construction along the Salween River.⁴⁷ The first of these scheduled for development in Karen State is the Hat Gyi dam, located on the eastern border of Papun District with the initial stages of site preparation, including road construction, and dam construction having been scheduled to begin around late 2006 to early 2007.⁴⁸ The project, being developed as part of a joint venture involving Burma's Department of Hydroelectric Power, the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) and China's Sinohydro Corp, with the actual construction done by the Thai energy firm MDX Plc is expected to provide between 1,100 and 1,500 megawatts of electricity, 85% of which will be exported to Thailand.⁴⁹ The layout will furthermore divert overflow through a series of dikes and culverts to the Bhumipol reservoir situated in Tak province of western Thailand. According to statements in 2006 by the Myanmar Investment Commission, the Thai funds earmarked for investment in the Salween River hydropower projects will nearly double Burma's foreign direct investment since 1988 to a total of US\$ 13.8 billion.⁵⁰

The Weh Gyi and Dagwin dams are to be built along a section of the Salween river dividing Burma and Thailand in eastern Papun District further south from the Hat Gyi site. The construction of the former will flood an estimated 960 square kilometres, 930 of which will be in Karen State. The latter, while expected to flood 5 square kilometres, will create a reservoir extending back up the Salween for 35 kilometres.⁵¹ While the Hat Gyi, Weh Gyi and Dagwin dams have become the most high profile of those being planned in Karen State, a number of other cases exist in various stages of completion which have so far been much less publicised. In Toungoo District, for example, the development of a dam on the Thauk Yay Ka (Day Loh) river between the Pa Leh Wah and Tun Boh village in Tantabin township has involved foreign engineers in land survey projects concurrent with the large-scale military buildup and attacks on villagers that have been most intensively carried out since November 2005. The Thauk Yay Ka dam in Toungoo District along with the Hat Gyi, Weh Gyi and Dagwin in Papun District all lie within the area of the current northern Karen State offensive. While not the primary cause of the ongoing SPDC military offensive against villagers that began in late 2005, these dams are nevertheless factors shaping the deployment of troops and construction of new roads as the army seeks to consolidate its hold in areas promising large economic returns.

⁴⁷ See *The Salween Under Threat: Damning the Longest Free River in Southeast Asia*, Salween Watch, October 2004 and *Damning at Gunpoint: Burma army atrocities pave the way for Salween Dams in Karen State*, Karen Rivers Watch, November 2004.

⁴⁸ "Hutgyi power plant moves downstream to raise output," *The Myanmar Times and Business Review*, September 18th - 22nd 2006. Accessed at www.myanmar.com/myanmartimes/MyanmarTimes17-334/b003.htm on January 30th 2007.

⁴⁹ "Govt goodbyes gas for hydropower," *The Myanmar Times and Business Review*, July 10th - 16th 2006. Accessed at www.myanmar.com/myanmartimes/MyanmarTimes17-324/b001.htm on January 30th 2007.

⁵⁰ "Thai investment in dam project would nearly double FDI," *The Myanmar Times and Business Review*, September 11th - 17th 2006. Accessed at www.myanmar.com/myanmartimes/MyanmarTimes17-333/n005.htm on January 30th 2007.

⁵¹ "Recent Dam and Water Diversion Plans," Salween Watch. Accessed at www.salweenwatch.org/dam_site.html on January 12th 2006.

Now that place is full of water...

SPDC claims that the electricity from these dams will benefit villagers can be partly judged on the historical experience of those in villages near completed dam projects, like this villager displaced from the Pa Thee dam site in Toungoo district who spoke to KHRG in 1996:

“When I was there in the village, the people were ordered to go to a place called Say Bu Taung for one week, for the dam project. The villagers near that [dam] area were relocated. The people had to dig the ground and to make something like a wall. The work depends on the work site. Each family is ordered to finish one part. Unless the work is completed, they cannot go home. People have to go by rotation. For example, this village has to go and then next time they order another village to go. Then the first village has to go again, and so on until the work is finished. People told me that they have to go at least once every month. Not only the dam project but also for the military, they have to bring bamboo and things, to give money and go and work themselves at their camp. The soldiers are there for the security of the dam. ... it is quite big. It is on the Pa Thee river, which is smaller than the Moei river. I assume that they are going to build a power plant or something like that, for electricity. But I don't know where the electricity will go. [Note: the Army later set up a large military training centre in this area with electricity. Local villages never received any electricity.]

They started building the dam two years ago and it is still going on now. It is supposed to be finished sometime in 1996. The river is blocked and there is a canal built below the dam. The area [above the dam] is now flooded and the village previously there was relocated. It was Ywa Gyi, a small Karen village. Now that place is full of water. The villagers lost their rice fields and some of them had rubber plantations. They couldn't do anything about it. They had to move. They received nothing [no compensation] and they were ordered to move to a place called Pya Sakan village. They went there and rebuilt their houses. The Government didn't provide any land for them. They had to manage on their own. They were ordered to move last year, and even a village further away called Ta Thay Gone was also relocated. Two villages in that area. God knows how many villagers. Ta Thay Gone is very far from the dam site - the water will not even reach there. It is about 8 miles south of the dam and the village is far from the river. But I think that place has become a military area, so the village had to be relocated. It is related to the dam, for security purposes. They are sending reinforcements for security.”

– Saw K--- (male, 29), Toungoo District (June 1996)

A further case which illustrates the detrimental fallout of dam construction as implemented by the SPDC is the recently finished Kyauk T’Gah hydroelectric

dam along the Khay Loh River in Hsaw Htee township, Nyaunglebin District. Although this project was completed at the start of January 2007, during the period of its construction SPDC IB #57 and LIBs # 349, 350, 589 and 598 took control of security for the region around the dam site, patrolling the area, forcibly evicting the communities living there and restricting any civilians from approaching. Local villagers say the SPDC was particularly anxious to prevent anyone from observing the engineers they had working at the dam site. One KHRG field researcher working in the area reported that the SPDC was constructing the dam with backing from partners in China and Korea, so it may have been nationals from these countries working as engineers on the project whom the SPDC hoped to shield from observation. As the dam construction drew near to completion at the end of 2006 the water level of the Khay Loh River began to rise. By the start of 2007, the villages of Dta Nay Pah, Kyauk T'Gah, T'Nay Htah, Htee Khay Htah and Waw Ray were already flooded and local villagers were forced to flee to higher ground, leaving behind their plantations of dog-fruit, coconut, tobacco, banana and betel nut now underwater. When the rainy season begins in May-June the water level risks rising even further, threatening the additional villages of Ywa Myo, Dta Leh Gkyoh, Aay Gk'Neh, Yoh Dah, Dta Yoh Baw, Dt'Nay Pah, Waw Goo and Htee Gkah Htah as well as Shwegyin town. Some villagers from these areas have therefore already abandoned their homes in search of higher ground while others have gone to Shwegyin town, despite the danger of flooding there as well. No compensation has been paid to these villagers, nor were alternate village sites provided.

The SPDC for its part has defended hydro-electricity as the basis of future energy self-sufficiency and economic prosperity for Burma. As such, the junta has pushed for a rapid increase in the number of dams throughout the country. State officials have glorified the advantages of harnessing the country's hydro-electric potential as both a viable solution to the country's energy needs as well as a lucrative export commodity. Apologists for the SPDC's hydropower expansion have furthermore cited a 1995 World Bank study estimating the potential hydropower yield of the country at approximately 108,000 megawatts.⁵² A 2006 press statement presents the SPDC's intentions:

"But now the government prefers hydropower. Hydropower currently accounts for about 38.5pc of electricity... But by 2030, the government hopes 100pc of the country's electricity will come from hydropower plants, which are the most cost-effective option"

- SPDC official from the Ministry of Electric Power (June 2006)⁵³

⁵² "Govt goodbyes gas for hydropower," *The Myanmar Times and Business Review*, July 10th – 16th 2006. Accessed at <http://www.myanmar.com/myanmartimes/MyanmarTimes17-324/b001.htm> on January 30th 2007.

⁵³ Ibid.

Abuses in dam development

"We heard about the construction of the SPDC's dam. They have planned to construct the dam for one or two years already. They have planned to build it in Day Loh. Now the villages that are next to this place are already destroyed. Also, the villagers have had to flee and stay in the forest as we do now. As for me, I think that the dam won't be useful nor have any benefit for the villagers and instead it will trouble the villagers."

– Saw L--- (male, 44), H--- village, Toungoo District (April 2006)

Even ignoring the questionable objectives of SPDC dam projects, the military abuses against local villagers living around dam sites should be enough in themselves to prevent inter-governmental cooperation on such projects. The construction of hydroelectric dams, like other military controlled infrastructure projects, involves large-scale land expropriation, mass eviction of the local civilian population and uncompensated forced labour. The flooding of vast tracts of land by dam reservoirs not only destroys local communities but also prevents the possibility of any future return. The obstruction of the Salween, the last major free-flowing river in Southeast Asia, will furthermore destroy local ecosystems and the communities downstream which depend on them for their livelihood.

"We heard that the SPDC has already started constructing a dam in the 2nd Brigade area [Toungoo District]. The villagers in that area have had to move to other places and their plants and crops were destroyed, but the SPDC didn't pay anything to those villagers. I don't think that the dam construction will have any benefit for the villagers. The SPDC also didn't give any support to the villagers who had to move."

– Saw E--- (male, 35), K--- village, Toungoo (April 2006)

"Recently we heard that the SPDC is planning to construct a dam at Pah Kay and on the Kay Law River at Klay Per Lay, and that they will generate electricity and will keep their families at Baw K'Hta. If they build the dam civilians will face many problems because water will flood many places... If they can build the dam, many places like betel nut plantations and durian plantations will be covered by water."

– Saw P--- (male, 50), T--- village, Nyaunglebin District (Nov 2005)

"To construct the dam, I think the SPDC will also order the villagers to help just as they usually do. As with the car road, they always force the villagers to construct it and every car road has been finished because of the strength and work of the villagers. So this time, I think they will also force the villagers to help them. Before, when they forced the villagers to work the villagers were not compensated, but they were scolded instead. They ordered the villagers to cut like this, to dig like this and scolded the villagers. Even though they forced the villagers to work for them, they didn't give them food to eat. They said that 'loh ah pay' [forced labour] has to help with everything. They say that even the tools

and the food the villagers have to bring by themselves.”

– Saw E--- (male, 22), G--- village, Toungoo District (2006)

Along with land confiscation and forced labour, the expansion of SPDC military control necessary to support the construction of large-scale hydroelectric dams has also involved human rights abuses linked to the increased militarisation of the area around planned dam sites. In securing areas of Toungoo and Papun Districts where hydroelectric projects are planned the SPDC has perpetrated attacks on villages, destruction of homes and other buildings, forced relocation, deployment of landmines in civilian areas and has applied a shoot-on-sight policy.⁵⁴ Continued development of the Salween dams is certain to lead to the forced displacement of thousands more villagers as they escape not only inundation by the reservoirs, but forced labour, rape and other abuses by SPDC forces sent to ‘secure’ the dams. In response, the armed conflict may escalate as the Karen National Liberation Army fights to prevent the dams from being constructed.

“The place where they will build the dam is at Taw Kyan and Lay Gaw. We can walk there in one and a half days from our village. The soldiers are from SPDC Army LID #66 and 400 [soldiers] are taking security for the dam now. I think this dam will be of no advantage for us because water will cover our homeland. The SPDC said they will get electricity that they will use in Burma and give to Thailand and to China; for these three countries. There are three groups that will construct this dam. They are the SPDC, Thailand and Japan. The SPDC said it has no money and cannot build this dam but can provide the army to take security... If they build the dam our village tract will be destroyed. We must move to another place, but we have no place to move to and settle and we will be covered by water and die. I want them not to make that dam.”

– Saw P--- (male, 34), C--- village, Papun District (April 2006)

Dams and military control

“We heard that the SPDC will construct a dam on the Salween River, but for me it has no benefit for the villagers. Their aim in constructing the dam is to trouble and destroy the villagers in order to defeat the KNU.”

– Saw P--- (male, 40), P--- village, Toungoo District (April 2006)

With the construction of each new hydroelectric dam, the SPDC projects military control into a new area and gains yet one more piece of infrastructure that must be ‘defended’. As the army takes security for dams, their surrounding areas and supporting roadways, soldiers forcibly evict civilians from nearby homes into military-controlled relocation sites. Those expelled from their

⁵⁴ For further information on related abuses please see *Papun Update: SPDC attacks on villages continue*, (Karen Human Rights Group, October 2006) and *SPDC Attacks on Villages in Nyaunglebin and Papun Districts and the Civilian Response*, (Karen Human Rights Group, September 2006).

homes are in turn subject to regular restrictions on movement and trade, extortion of money, food and supplies and forced labour – all of which serves to support the expanded military presence and the various satellite camps that have sprung up throughout Karen State. In this way, expanded military control undermines civilians' livelihoods and exacerbates poverty. In the face of such conditions, the SPDC nonetheless promises affected villagers that *"if people make the dams you will get electricity and it will be useful for you."* Precedent proves otherwise, however, as the SPDC consistently sells off the energy supplies to neighbouring countries and diverts whatever remains towards feeding military infrastructure, leaving the rest of the country with chronic blackouts and most of rural Karen State with no access to electricity whatsoever.

"To construct the dam, the SPDC didn't inform or ask for any agreement with the villagers. They didn't inform the villagers, but they came and looked at the place to construct the dam as they were ordered. They said that they were ordered by their upper leaders to construct the dam."

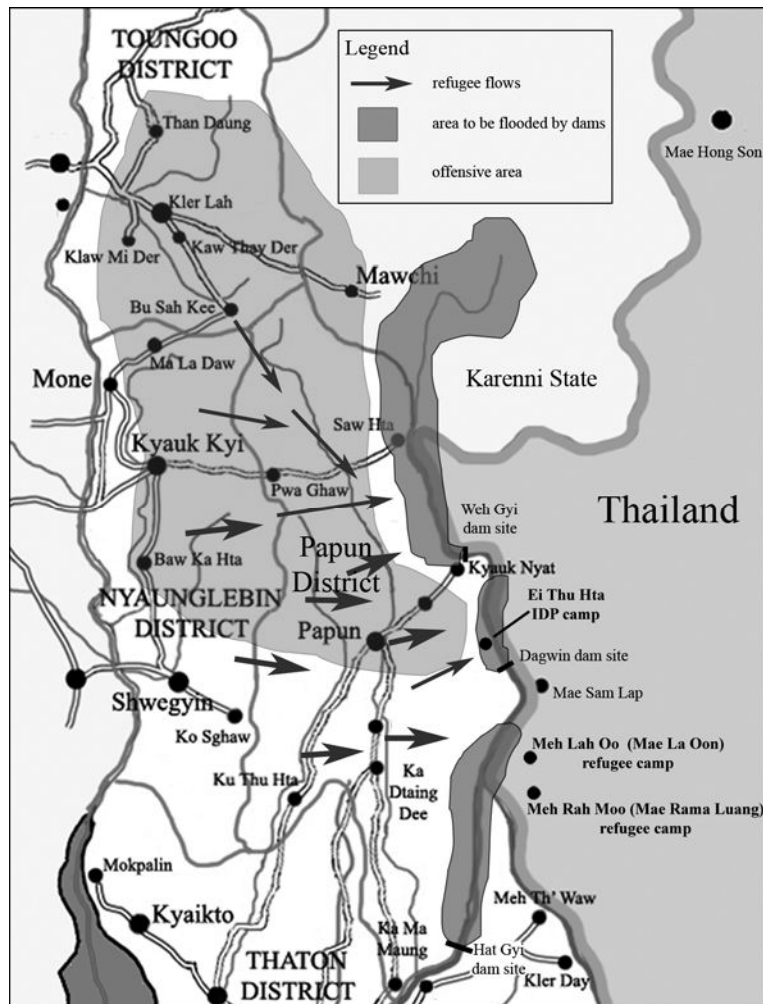
– Saw E--- (male, 22), G--- village, Toungoo District (2006)

A useful example is provided by a dam on the Day Loh river in western Toungoo District which has been under construction since early 2006. Though only a small dam, the SPDC sent hundreds of additional troops in to secure the dam area. Villages were forcibly relocated, and since early 2006 villages have been forced to take turns sending one person from each family for 'sentry duty' at the dam site; if a family cannot send someone they must pay a 1,000 kyat per day fine. On arriving at a refugee camp in Thailand a few months later, villager Saw T--- from one of these villages told KHRG that *"since December 2005, forced portering has increased rather than decreased. They have demanded five people from our village every day. ... This did not only occur in our village but also in other villages."* One of his companions, Saw N---, added that, *"the SPDC soldiers from IB [Infantry Battalion] #48 have been trying to establish new camps in many places and they have ordered the villagers to cut a lot of bamboo for them. Sometimes they demanded 100 pieces and sometimes they demanded 200 pieces. We have to get wood and thatch for them as well. On top of this, we also have to be 'set tha' [messengers and camp servants] for them. Five people have to go and carry water for them ten or twenty times a day."*⁵⁵

Some dams have a very clear political motivation, such as the Hat Gyi, Dagwin and Weh Gyi dams on the Salween River. If constructed, the reservoirs of these three dams will combine to turn most of the territory along a 200 kilometre stretch of the Salween river, including approximately 150 kilometres along which it forms the Burma-Thai border, into an inland sea. This stretch of river is currently where all refugees from northern Karen districts cross into Thailand. It is also the principal supply line for aid to internally displaced villagers throughout northern Karen State, and a major KNU/KNLA supply line.

⁵⁵ For more information see *Toungoo District: Update on the dam on the Day Loh river*, (Karen Human Rights Group, May 2006).

Damming the river would therefore block the escape of refugees and cut off supplies of relief aid from Thailand to the internally displaced, while simultaneously cutting off from behind the KNLA forces who protect the displaced villagers and facilitate aid delivery. The villagers of northern Karen State would become rats in a trap to the SPDC, while Thailand would benefit by no longer receiving additional refugees, and those already in Thailand would become completely cut off from their homeland.



This map shows approximations of the areas that will be flooded should the Hat Gyi, Weh Gyi and Dagwin dams be constructed. These new lakes will effectively blockade travel across much of the Thai-Burma border, especially if the SPDC decides to patrol these waters with gun boats. [Map: KHRG]

Agricultural schemes

“Moreover, the Government is to encourage rural people to do farming plus livestock breeding.”

- SPDC Senior General Than Shwe (October 2006)⁵⁶

“On January 14th 2006 SPDC leaders held a ceremony for the best castor plantation in Kya-In Seik Gyi township. They took video and advertised proudly to the whole country that by attending this ceremony the civilians supported them in making castor plantations. But it is not real because they ordered the village chairpersons and secretaries to attend this ceremony without fail.”

- KHRG field researcher, Dooplaya District (Jan 2006)

SPDC spokespersons consistently herald the military's agricultural policies as the bases for national prosperity. Individual farmers and the country as a whole, so their argument goes, will profit by increasing the area under cultivation as well as the yield of agricultural fields through the utilisation of new techniques, plant species, fertilisers and technology. The implication is that these inputs depend on SPDC management of national agricultural policies with which the civilian population must necessarily comply. The aims are ostensibly national and local prosperity. Using this argument, the SPDC has managed to secure financial and technical support from the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for the implementation of various agricultural development initiatives, such as *“Village Level Processing”*, which aims to *“link production or technology based projects to market opportunities through creation of a rural based entrepreneur culture.”*⁵⁷ Using funds provided by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the FAO also initiated the *“Oil Crops Development Project”* in 2006.⁵⁸ Despite international support for such programmes, and in contrast to SPDC rhetoric, recent academic studies of Burma's agricultural programme have concluded that,

“The genuine policy objective of the [SPDC] government seems to consist of the following two elements: avoidance of social unrest and sustenance of the regime. These two main objectives have required agricultural policy to accord with the following two subordinate aims. One aim is to stabilize prices at a low level for the commodities that are indispensable for the people's diet. The other is to sustain state

⁵⁶ Quoted in “Development of a country depends on progress of rural areas, and development of urban areas are underpinned by economic infrastructures in rural areas Senior General Than Shwe attends Meeting No 1/2006 of Central Committee for Development of Border Areas and National Races,” *The New Light of Myanmar*, October 4th 2006.

⁵⁷ “FAO projects in the country,” Food and Agricultural Organisation for the United Nations. Accessed at www.fao.org/countryprofiles/index.asp?lang=en&subj=7&iso3=MMR on March 6th 2007.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

*enterprise in the agro-processing sector which depends for its raw materials on domestically produced agricultural commodities.*⁵⁹

In practice these aims have contradicted each other as SPDC officials in Karen State have extorted rice and other agricultural products from villagers to support the military or military-business industries. Following a 1991 SLORC decree, not until civilians harvest a set quota of rice and sell it to military authorities will local authorities grant them any permission to grow alternate subsistence or cash crops.⁶⁰ While the SPDC claims to have terminated official rice quotas in about 2003, after criticism from the World Bank, it appears that these have merely been replaced by opportunistic crop confiscation by military officers and local authorities which nevertheless continues systematically. The quantity and diversity of basic food stuffs available to civilians has thus decreased while their price, along with inflation in general, has skyrocketed. With each passing year the growing military confiscates more rice, while the SPDC attempts to increase rice exports in order to generate foreign exchange and present an image of economic stability. Domestically, the price of rice in 2006 rose 30% nationwide.⁶¹ Rather than military agricultural policies, however, the SPDC has blamed the rising prices on unscrupulous rice traders.

"The people have already known that there is rice sufficiency in the country... As a result, the rice price is in normal position and stable. If the traders continue to carry out their business in the hope of making their profit only, effective action will be taken against them in the interest of the entire people."

- Minister for Information Brig-Gen Kyaw Hsan (August 2006)⁶²

Rather than addressing the root causes of rice shortages by reducing military confiscation and export, the SPDC has sought to enforce the intensification of rice production. State agencies, backed by military enforcement, may then siphon off surplus produce from rural areas for sale at official 'discount rice shops' situated in urban centres while simultaneously blaming rising rice prices on those *"who were hoarding rice in a bid to create an artificial shortage in the market and thus push up prices."*⁶³ SPDC officials have systematised the extortion of rice through the *"three internal major agricultural systems"*, namely *"the procurement system, the planned cropping system and the state ownership*

⁵⁹ Fujita and Ikuku, "Agricultural Policies and Development of Myanmar's Agricultural Sector: An Overview", *IDE Discussion Paper*, No. 63, July 2006. p.21

⁶⁰ Nancy Hudson-Rodd and Myo Nyunt. April 2001. "Control of Land and Life in Burma," *Tenure Brief* No. 3:1-8. Land Tenure Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Accessed at http://agecon.lib.umn.edu/cgi-bin/pdf_view.pl?paperid=2580&ftype=.pdf on March 1st 2007.

⁶¹ "Roundup: Myanmar takes measures to bring down commodity prices," *People's Daily Online*, August 30th 2006. Accessed at http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200608/30/eng20060830_298141.html on January 23rd 2007.

⁶² "Campaign to end poppy cultivation concerns only with nation as it must be launched with internal strength," *Press Conference*, August 16th 2006. Accessed at www.myanmar.com/pressconference/index.html on March 1st 2007.

⁶³ "Rice traders accused of hording," *The Myanmar Times*, August 14-20 2006. Accessed at www.myanmar.com/myanmartimes/MyanmarTimes17-329/b003.htm on January 9th 2007.

of farmland.”⁶⁴ The procurement system operates as a paddy quota demanded by the military proportional to the area of a given agricultural field. Recently soldiers have demanded that villagers make their rice quota payments in cash. Whether in cash or in kind these payments are over and above the *ad hoc* demands for food by passing army units, intermittent extortion to support local army camps and forced provisions for official meetings, rallies, trainings and festivals. Since 1998 SPDC Army units in the field have been ordered to ‘live off the land’ as much as possible, which has resulted in increased demands for food from villages and confiscation of rice-producing land which villagers are then forced to sow, tend and harvest for the Army.

“The SPDC collects taxes on our land, gardens and fields too. We have to send the money to the Operations Command at [Kya-In] Seik Gyi. The total we collected this year was 6,000 kyat. They collect that money every year. In August 2004 one of the SPDC officers from Seik Gyi ordered that every field or garden beside the car road must be measured and the owners must pay him 5,000 kyat.”

– Naw L--- (female, 34), village head, T--- village, Dooplaya District (Jan 2006)



Saw B--- and his wife with their rice mill in Dweh Loh township, Papun district. On January 18th 2006 SPDC Camp Commander Pee Ta of SPDC Light Infantry Battalion #349 in Wa Mu camp issued an order that every rice mill owner in the area must give him two baskets of milled rice without payment. This photo shows the couple milling the rice which they will then have to deliver to Wa Mu camp. Villagers in the area say they are subjected to constant demands like this from officer Pee Ta. [Photo: KHRG]

⁶⁴ Fujita and Ikuku. July 2006. “Agricultural Policies and Development of Myanmar’s Agricultural Sector: An Overview”, *IDE Discussion Paper*, No. 63. pp.4

In order to increase the intake of the procurement system, the SPDC has attempted to implement an agricultural intensification scheme in a number of ways, including forcing farmers to plant a second dry-season rice crop (a practice known as 'double-cropping'); forcing them to cultivate other crop species, often on top of their regular rice growing; and forcing them to purchase fertiliser, tractors or other farming supplies and equipment. Local SPDC officials carry out such programmes via village heads who must attend regional meetings where military officials inform them about the latest SPDC agricultural fixation they must adopt. Far from any discussion between farmers and officials of possible improvements for local farming practices, these meetings are one-way lectures where villagers are told what is required of them. Feedback is neither expected nor sought. Not only do such schemes operate as blatant extortion rackets, but they are also agriculturally naïve. Military bureaucrats lacking any understanding of local growing conditions devise cultivation strategies aimed at boosting production unfettered by environmental actualities. Although farmers may realise the absurdity of a given proposal, they are given no opportunity to express such views. While violent repression may limit villagers' freedom to reject such demands outright, they nevertheless see through any claims about the legitimacy of such programmes.

"Every time we attend these meetings we must cover our own expenses. They never provide us with anything. We collect money among our villagers. Those meetings have no benefit for our villagers because their plans have no benefit for our villagers. Our people cannot follow their plans. For example the castor crop scheme has had no benefit and is not a success. The [SPDC introduced] paddy seeds [called] Shin Thwe Hla, M'Naw Tun, M' Naw Thu Ka and Shwe Myanmar which are very strange for our people and [they] dare not plant them because we have never cropped them before. All of us [village heads] discussed together that we must act properly because we cannot oppose this armed organisation."

- Ko M--- (male, 44), N--- village, Dooplaya District (June 2006)

Not only must village heads bring their own food and supplies and take time away from their own agricultural labour in order to attend such meetings, but local SPDC officials also order them to cover the costs of whatever new crop, equipment or agricultural supplies they are forced to purchase. If new crops or other agricultural schemes fail, as they often do, villagers must bear these costs as well.

Double cropping

"The Village Peace and Development chairperson ordered us to cultivate paddy in dry season which is called 'double cultivation' and the name of the paddy is Shin Thwe Lah. Every village must cultivate it. The biggest problem which we are facing is that we have no water in the dry season time. For our P--- village we must buy three baskets of paddy seed at

2,800 kyat per basket of that paddy seed. We cannot cultivate this in our village because we have no water and so we went to cultivate at Ser Muh Ter [in Pwo Karen], T'Kung Dtaing [in Burmese] village's flat fields. I sowed that paddy only six or seven days ago now. I think it's not a benefit for us and people don't want to cultivate it but the VPDC chairperson forced us to do it. Our people must do this without fail. If we fail, how they will punish us I don't know."

– Saw N--- (male, 43), P--- village, Dooplaya District (Jan 2006)

Forced 'double cropping' of rice is widespread in areas of Karen State under SPDC control. Under this scheme, villagers – whose normal rice growing cycle roughly covers the rainy season of June to October, with the harvest following in November – must plant a second paddy crop during the dry months after the harvest. Dry season rice cultivation requires special species of rice whose growing cycle lasts only a few months, and requires irrigation because there is no rain. Villagers are typically averse to planting this second crop as it almost certainly fails or underproduces due to insufficient water supplies. Nonetheless, local SPDC officials force villagers to purchase special varieties of paddy seed at above-market rates. As the amount of paddy seed that villagers are forced to purchase is often in excess of the capacity of their respective farm fields, officials advise them to plant in any available space, such as alongside roadways. The lack of irrigation mean crops typically fail in whole or in part so villagers must, in lieu of paddy, pay military 'tax' collectors with cash earned elsewhere. As one villager from Dooplaya District put it, *"If lightning were to strike us all on the head, that would be better than trying to plant paddy in the dry season."*

"On November 30th 2005, the chairperson of the TPDC wrote a letter to the village head and ordered the villagers to grow rice. They gave 30 baskets of paddy seed to our village, but we had to give them 2800 kyat per basket of paddy. We were ordered to grow paddy in the dry season. Most of the villagers would face big problems in growing rice during the dry season because there isn't enough water in the dry season. They haven't given the money for the paddy yet and they have to give it to them after they have planted the paddy. Even if the planting is not successful, we have to pay them this money [for the seed paddy]. They ordered the villagers to plant the paddy on the side of the road. Last year, they ordered us to grow four acres of paddy [in our fields] as well, but it wasn't successful and we didn't even get a single tin⁶⁵. The TPDC also told the villagers to grow rubber so that the villagers would know more about rubber cultivation."

– U L--- (male, 56), K--- village, Dooplaya District (Jan 2006)

"The SPDC forced the villages to do dry season paddy planting. There isn't enough water in dry season and our village is far from the river so we decided not to do dry season planting. They talked about it to us in

⁶⁵ A 'tin' is a standard unit of measurement equal to 16 kg. / 35 lb. of rice, or less weight if unhusked paddy.

the meeting, but we weren't interested in it so we didn't say anything. They said that they wanted us to be rich so they suggested this to us and forced us to do this. But we knew that there wasn't enough water and it would have no benefit for us, so we didn't do it. The kind of paddy was Sin Thweh Luh. They said that after three months we could do the harvest. They gave us paddy and we had to give them 2000 kyat per basket of paddy."

– U H--- (male, 56), chairperson, C--- village, Doooplaya District (Jan 2006)

"In December 2005, the SPDC forced nine villages surrounding my village to do dry season planting. They wrote to us and called us to a meeting at Kya In Seik Gyi. In the meeting the Agriculture Group, under the SPDC, told us to do dry season planting. They also told us to buy paddy at 2500 kyat per basket and plant it by ourselves. Nine of our villages have to plant 15 acres each of the dry season paddy. But we haven't started the planting yet because we don't have much water in the dry season. We don't want to do that because we know we won't get any profit and we will lose all of our invested money. We have already told them that it won't be a benefit for the villagers and we will all lose our invested money, but they still force us to do it."

– Ko U--- (male, 33), chairperson, K--- village, Doooplaya District (Jan 2006)

"The SPDC gave out a document from Pa'an [Order 1/99 and subsequent orders in 2000] stating that they wouldn't use forced labour any longer. Our village head told the Operations Commander, 'your leaders said they wouldn't demand forced labour anymore and wouldn't make us do anything against our will anymore.' And the village heads asked that since now they force villagers to do dry season paddy cultivation, sesame cultivation and rubber cultivation whether that wasn't forced labour. Then the Operations Commander said that they didn't force the villagers, but they did it for the development of their country. So, some of the village heads replied that it bothered and interrupted the villagers' work or occupations."

– Naw L--- (female, 34), T--- village, Doooplaya District (Jan 2006)

Castor planting

A recent SPDC agricultural scheme implemented extensively since the end of 2005 and operating in conjunction with the procurement system is the forced planting of castor beans. The castor plant is an oil crop whose beans the SPDC has advertised as an alternative energy source as 'biofuel'. In an apparent effort to reduce Burma's (and particularly the military's) reliance on imported fuel, the SPDC decreed the planting of castor and the related *jatropha* bean – sometimes referred to together as 'physic nut' – to be a national duty.⁶⁶ On January 17th 2006 SPDC Minister of Industry U Aung Thaung gave a speech; *"Noting that the cultivation of an acre (0.405 hectare) of land with 1,200*

⁶⁶ "Information Sheet," Myanmar Information Committee, March 9th 2006. Accessed at www.myanmar-information.net/infosheet/2006/060309.htm on March 18th 2007.

*physic nut plants can produce up to 100 gallons (454.6 liters) of biodiesel, he said the government has made arrangements to put nearly 8,000 hectares under more than 5 million physic nut saplings.*⁶⁷ In December 2005, the SPDC announced that “50,000 acres in each of Myanmar’s nine military divisions” would be commandeered to plant castor.⁶⁸ SPDC Lieutenant-General Myint Swe claimed in early 2006 that, “*Biofuel is essential as a substitute for diesel, gasoline and natural gas in the industrial sector.*”⁶⁹ This reflects what the SPDC has been telling villagers in their attempt to convince them of the benefits of castor and to ensure civilian compliance in planting.

“The SPDC told us the purpose of planting castor was that we will receive the castor seeds, then we will grind the seeds and the oil of castor seeds will become diesel and it will be available for our vehicles. For the future we will have no diesel in our country of Burma so we must start to plant castor.”

– Daw T--- (female, 53), K--- village, Dooطلا District (Jan 2006)

“They [the SPDC soldiers] also told us to do castor planting. They said that people could then make paraffin or kerosene.”

– U Kyot Tin (male, 50), T--- village, Papun District (April 2006)

“They told us that in the future, if we can gather the castor seeds we can sell them as our own or we can sell them to the government. They said that now we have to buy a bowl of castor seeds for 8,000⁷⁰ kyat, but when we sell it we can sell a bowl of castor for at least 5,000-6,000 kyat. They said that if people grind it, it will turn into diesel. If it turns into diesel, they said we could drive cars, motorbikes, tractors and we could also run boats. They also said that after we grind the castor seeds, the husk or chaff of the castor that is left can be used as a fertiliser.”

– U M--- (male, 55), T--- village, Dooطلا District (June 2006)

⁶⁷ [‘Myanmar eyes physic nut oil as fuel to help solve oil crisis’](#), Xinhua news service (China), 18 January 2006.

⁶⁸ [‘Castor beans to be grown for biofuel’](#), Myanmar Times, 9-15 January 2006.

⁶⁹ “Castor beans to be grown for biofuel,” *The Myanmar Times*, January 9th-15th 2006. Accessed at www.myanmar.com/myanmartimes/MyanmarTimes15-299/n014.htm on January 9th 2007.

⁷⁰ In most areas of Karen State where the SPDC has been implementing the forced castor planting programme, the military has been demanding about 3,300 to 3,500 kyat per bowl of castor seeds. In this case it appears local officers are exploiting the castor program to get additional profits for themselves.



A collection of young castor plants near the roadside in Dt'Nay Hsah township, Pa'an District, where the SPDC has forced villagers to plant them. [Photo KHRG]

In expectation of the purported uses of castor the SPDC has been forcing villagers throughout military-controlled areas of Karen State to purchase the unfamiliar seeds and plant them on any and all available land, even to the extent of replacing their traditional crops. Having demanded that villagers attend meetings where they are told they must plant castor, local SPDC officials then force them to pay arbitrary prices for the purchase of the seeds.

"The last meeting that I attended was on May 31st 2006 and the Township Peace and Development Council directed us to cultivate castor and 100 baskets of paddy seed without fail and a basket of paddy cost 4,000 kyat. They ordered us to cultivate castor on 300 acres of our K--- [village] area. They gave us six kilos of castor seeds and we had to pay 6,000 kyat for one kilo. In my village tract I have three villages. I have not paid the costs yet but I must pay by the end of this month without fail. For me I don't think it's a benefit for our villagers and we will face more problems. We must cultivate castor without fail. If we don't cultivate it, the police will take action against us and will arrest us. They told us this castor will become fuel but I don't know if it will become so or not."

- Ko T--- (male, 37), K--- village, Dooplaya District (June 2006)

[Stamp:]
Township Peace & Development Council
Kawkareik township

Township Peace & Development Council
Kawkareik town, Karen State

Announcement

1368 BE 7th waxing day of Nayon
Date: 2006 June 2nd

Subject: To grow fully 30,000 acres [sic: bushes] of castor plants as fencing in 2006 in Kawkareik township

1. Kawkareik township of Kawkareik district has to grow 100,000 (one hundred thousand) castor fencing plants between 2006 and 2008. By the end of 2006 it is planned to grow 30,000 (thirty thousand) acres [sic: plants]. Battalions, troops, individuals, departmental staff and the people have been implementing this earnestly as a national duty.
2. All people living in Kawkareik township have been implementing this as a personal duty, however some people do not obey and it has been learned that some [seeds] have been resold to outsiders. Growing fencing castor plants is to your benefit, and moreover it will fulfil requirements for fuel for machinery. It is planned that you may also sell the surplus for extra income.
3. Therefore it is announced that citizens of the township must work hard to exceed the 2006 plan to grow 30,000 acres [sic: plants] and fulfil your quota of plants so that this fencing castor bean plantation project will be successful.

[Sd.]
Chairperson
(Htun Win, Pa/2948)

Letter No. 5 / 3-1 / Oo 6

Date: 2006 June 2nd

Distribution to:

- all departments, Kawkareik town
- all chairpersons of Ward/Village Tract Peace & Development Councils (to be announced over loudspeakers in your ward/village, and this announcement is to be posted at offices).

Copies to:

- chairperson, District Peace & Development Council, Kawkareik town
- office / file

"The SPDC ordered us to plant castor. We don't want to do it because we have so much other work to do. They told us to give them 3,300 kyat for each bowl of castor seed, and they ordered our village to plant 14 bowls. They said that this year, 2006, we have to plant 83 acres, then 166 acres in 2007 and 166 acres again in 2008. They ordered that each household has to plant 200 castor bushes each year, 600 castor bushes over 3 years. We have to plant this on our own land."

– U A--- (male, 58), W--- village, Doooplaya District (Jan 2006)



On May 14th 2006 these villagers from Bu Tho township, Papun District were in the middle of sowing the year's rice crop, a cooperative activity where they work as a group on a different family's field each day, when the SPDC authorities ordered them to purchase and then sow castor seeds. As a result of the order, they had to hurry to finish their rice sowing to allow time to go and plant the castor bushes. Each man, woman and child (including infants) in every village was ordered to account for planting 100 castor bushes. The above photo shows them gathering after rice planting to go for forced labour planting castor. [Photo: KHRG]

"In January 2006 they wrote two order documents to my village ordering the villagers to plant castor. They forced the villagers to come and buy castor seed from them and to plant it. They ordered that the villages around Kya In Seik Gyi have to set aside 1,200 acres to plant castor, and that the acreage must increase every year. The order letters came from the TPDC chairman and from U Hla Shwe of the Ministry of Agriculture in Kya In Seik Gyi."

– U L--- (male, 56), village head, C--- village, Dooplaya District (Jan 2006)

As villagers have complained about needing their land for more important crops, SPDC and DKBA soldiers implementing the orders to plant the castor have told villagers to cultivate the plant alongside roadways or in place of fencing. Despite the rigour with which the SPDC has gone ahead with the castor planting scheme, local officials have provided little technical information on the how to cultivate the plant. The beans furthermore contain ricin, a poisonous extract *"among the most lethal naturally occurring toxins known today"*,⁷¹ *"much more toxic than cyanide, in its pure form as little as 1 milligram*

⁷¹ Mark A. Hostetler, "Toxicity, plants – castor bean and jequirity bean," June 26th 2003. Accessed at www.emedicine.com/PED/topic331.htm on December 22nd, 2006.

can kill an adult human.”⁷² On swallowing a single raw castor bean, an individual may experience within hours symptoms including abdominal pain, vomiting, and severe, sometimes bloody, diarrhoea and death can follow. Villagers in Karen and other areas of Burma have reported dizziness, nausea and severe symptoms after they or their children have put a single bean in their mouth without even swallowing it. Given such dangers, most countries enforce strict regulations on castor growing conditions. The SPDC, however, has provided no health and safety information nor even explained appropriate cultivation methods.

“Daw Theh May [VPDC chairperson of Kya In village tract] sent two bowls of castor seeds to us. She asked us to plant [them] and we must pay 6,600 kyat for those two bowls of castor seeds. No one wants to plant it nor knows how to plant it either. I think this castor bean will not do us any good. No one wants to plant it and we don’t know how to plant it. No one dares keep it in their house because they worry that their children will eat the beans. Last week two children ate some and they vomited and had diarrhoea until they nearly died. We went to ask the Camp Commander if we can stay [in the village] without planting castor, but he said he doesn’t know about this and it is not his job. We think we won’t plant it, we’ll just pay the cost they demanded and store the seed in a safe place.”

– Daw L--- (female, 49), K--- village, Dooplaya District (Jan 2006)

Given the extortion and forced labour with which the SPDC has enforced castor cultivation in Karen areas, the fact the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, is fully funding the oil crop cultivation programme with a total of US\$ 14 million – US\$ 12.3 million of which is being financed by OPEC – is particularly alarming. The project, which the FAO claims “*will increase oilseed production and improve oil processing technologies*” also includes financial support for “*the construction of two new oil solvent extraction plants and the upgrading of existing oil processing facilities.*”⁷³ Given that the SPDC has only negligibly promoted the cultivation of edible oil plants – for which the FAO claims the funds are intended – while regions across Burma have reported the military’s practice of enforcing castor cultivation, KHRG believes that the US\$ 14 million given to the junta for the oil crop cultivation programme may rather have funded, at least in part, the castor cultivation scheme under which the military has perpetrated forced labour and extortion. The FAO however, remains vague about the implementation details of this programme. In response to KHRG inquiries on this matter an FAO consultant on crop production based at the organisation’s Regional Office for the Asia Pacific in Bangkok, responded that the FAO was not operating a castor cultivation programme in Burma, “*To the best of my knowledge.*” Whether or not the

⁷² “*Ricinus communis* (Castor bean),” Cornell University, Department of Animal Science. Accessed at www.ansci.cornell.edu/plants/castorbean.html on December 22nd, 2006.

⁷³ “OPEC Fund to support development of Myanmar’s edible oil sector,” FAO Newsroom, November 9th 2006. Accessed at www.fao.org/newsroom/en/news/2006/1000437/index.html on March 7th 2007.

SPDC is using the FAO funds for the forced castor cultivation scheme, the risk of abuse in the implementation of the oil crop cultivation programme remains. Given the manner in which the regime consistently enforces agricultural schemes through forced labour and extortion, such abuses are equally likely when applied to cultivation programmes involving other crops. Greater information, beyond the scant public details the organisation currently makes available, is therefore necessary in order to assess the human rights impact of the FAO's oil crop cultivation programme and other agricultural schemes.

Forced purchases

Forcing civilians to purchase any of a wide array of goods is a common practice by both SPDC and DKBA officials who try to pass off such demands as something other than outright extortion. While these officials often claim the purchased items have economic value – or can be turned into something of economic value – villagers frequently find themselves having to pay high prices for worthless items ranging from the contextually inappropriate to the outright fraudulent. While in some cases DKBA commanders have ordered villagers to purchase self-aggrandising products like calendars bearing photographs of themselves and their families or copies of CDs containing a selection of their favourite audio tracks, forced purchases are more typically framed as functional components of the SPDC's wider development agenda; a supposedly sound investment at both the village and State level. Using the rhetoric of development, SPDC officials order villagers to purchase such agricultural products as the paddy and castor seeds mentioned above, but also items such as fertilisers and motorised tractors.

Fertiliser has now become a yearly purchase enforced on villagers across SPDC-controlled areas of Karen State. Local officials set prices and purchase quotas for each village and demand compliance 'without fail'. Villagers have reported to KHRG that the fertiliser which local officials force them to buy is useless, providing no improvement in plant growth or overall harvest yield. The purchase is a drain on both their limited financial resources and their time. Whether this fertiliser is knowingly fraudulent or simply ineffective under local environmental conditions is somewhat irrelevant; villagers' feedback is never sought and forced purchases continue unabated.

"Township Peace and Development Council ordered us to buy fertiliser. My village had to buy 12 packs. To buy one pack costs 700 kyat. No one wants to use the fertiliser. I dumped it on the firewood pile under my house. This fertiliser is of no good use for any plants, but every village must buy the fertiliser without fail."

– Daw N--- (female, 45), D--- village, Dooplaya District (June 2006)

Villagers in Papun and Dooplaya Districts have also reported having to buy broken tractors from local SPDC officials. These demands appear to be connected to the business ties of the local military elite. In 2006 villagers living around Myawaddy town in Pa'an District were told at a meeting with SPDC

officials that the tractors had come from a company based in Pa'an town that was not able to use or sell the equipment. The tractors displayed at the meeting were visibly old and worn out, yet the villagers were nevertheless required to pay for them. In this and other cases of forced tractor purchases, villagers have found without much surprise that when tested after returning home the equipment proved to be damaged and completely unusable. The tractors have therefore been left to rust in various out of the way places in the villages.

"In 2004 they [local SPDC officials] ordered us to implement plans such as cultivating castor, buying #16 [model] hand-operated tractors,⁷⁴ [buying] Shwe Myit Weh [a kind of fertiliser], [organising] the village peace programme⁷⁵ and [organising] the migration programme⁷⁶ which every ward and village must do without fail according to the quota set for us. Sometimes it is very difficult for me to arrange this [as village head he must gather the money from the villagers]. I bought a #16 tractor which was 780,000 kyat at Kawkareik previously in April 2004. The order to buy [these things] was the plan of the Township Peace and Development Council. After I bought [the tractor] I couldn't use it because its engine was no good. I informed the agriculture official who sold the #16 tractor to me and he told me that everyone was required to buy [a tractor] no matter whether or not [they] could use it."

- Ko T--- (male, 37), K--- village, Dooplaya District (June 2006)

"The TPDC chairman forced the villagers to do dry season planting, and he also forced the villagers to buy a tractor from him. The villagers didn't want to buy it but they forced us, so we bought it for 750,000 kyat. After we bought it no one used it, so we kept it under the monastery. Some people from another village said they would buy it, but when they came to see it they said this tractor isn't any good. I would sell it even for just 550,000, but nobody wants to buy it. They also forced the villagers to buy their paddy seed and plant it. Some of the villagers had already tried that, but their paddy plants didn't even grow as high as one cubit [18 inches / 45 cm]. Then they [SPDC] said that the villagers didn't follow their instructions and that's why the crop didn't grow well."

- U B--- (male, 61), T--- village, Dooplaya District (Jan 2006)

⁷⁴ These are long-handled self-propelled (petrol-fuelled) ploughing machines used mainly to plough irrigated rice fields; the operator walks behind the machine.

⁷⁵ The 'village peace programme' is a method of regimentation whereby villagers are required to organise themselves to work on military forced labour projects and carry out any other demands the SPDC makes on the community.

⁷⁶ The 'migration programme' involves individual, household and village-level registration which the SPDC requires of all civilians as a means of controlling the movement of people in and out of villages and towns.

Agriculture schemes and military control

"The SPDC soldiers would like to make it difficult for us to get food so that we will be hungry. Because of this, more villagers are fleeing from the villages and some are going to the refugee camps in Thailand."

– Saw R--- (male, 66), T--- village, Toungoo District (March 2006)

The contradictions inherent in the SPDC's twin goals of sustaining local military structures through the extortion of food while mitigating urban social unrest by suppressing the prices of staple goods have caused both widespread poverty in rural areas and skyrocketing market food prices. The extortion of staple foods and livestock far beyond what could be considered 'surplus' has combined with land confiscation, forced labour and disastrous agricultural programmes to entrench village-level poverty. Such rural poverty has not only obstructed villagers' capacities to meet their basic needs, but furthermore undermined their strategies to resist military control. Despite fertile environmental conditions, extensive local knowledge of agricultural conditions, and a culturally embedded agricultural tradition, SPDC policies have effectively stunted agricultural development in Karen areas and driven many people away from agriculture. Nevertheless, to justify and glorify continued military rule to both the domestic and international audience, the SPDC continues to present the agricultural sector as flourishing and growing with the benefits of its top-down technocratic development strategies.

"The last time that we went to the SPDC's TPDC meeting was on June 15th. TPDC chairperson U Htun Win said, 'we talked to you about this for your own village's benefit, not for our own. We suggested this to you so you would have sufficient food. Look after and take care of your castor and rubber plantations and don't let your land be empty. Tell your villagers to plant castor.'"

– U M--- (male, 55), village head, T--- village, Dooplaya District (June 2006)

By presenting the SPDC's agricultural initiatives as the most effective means of improving the agricultural situation of rural peoples, the junta has sought support from the international donor community to bolster the systems of agricultural exploitation while simultaneously diverting blame for the humanitarian crisis away from the politics of local control. Local villagers have nevertheless resisted the SPDC's agricultural initiatives through various forms of non-compliance, some of which emerge in the quotes already presented. Village heads understate their village's capacity and attempt to negotiate a reduction in demands. Villagers delay payment on forced purchases and discard castor and other seed they were forced to by without bothering to plant them, or only partially comply with such demands. Where possible villagers avoid SPDC demands altogether by evading military personnel who come to their village to issue such orders. In regions where this non-compliance has made villages ungovernable, such as in northern Karen State, the SPDC has responded with large-scale forced relocation and scorched earth campaigns which, presented under the rubric of 'counter-insurgency' but targeted directly at civilians, have gone even further to erode local subsistence and independent

agricultural initiatives. By blocking trade routes, burning cropland, destroying food supplies and food storage buildings and laying landmines in and around fields, the SPDC and their DKBA proxies have systematically undermined the capacities of local peoples in rural areas of Karen State to manage their basic subsistence needs, let alone profit from trade in agricultural goods.

“When they [DKBA soldiers] first arrived at the village, they frightened the villagers a lot. They said, ‘bring out all of the rice that KNU soldiers keep in this village. If you don’t bring it out and if I can find it myself, you will be put in jail and you will be in big trouble.’”

– Naw K--- (female, 50), K--- village, Bilin township (July 2006)

“We heard about the [January 2004] cease-fire of the KNU and SPDC. Even though the SPDC met with KNU to establish a cease-fire, they sent their soldiers more and more. A larger number of [SPDC] soldiers have conducted more operations in the area of our village than they did before the cease-fire. They patrolled around the villages and burned the villages. So the villagers planted cardamom for their living,⁷⁷ but they came and burned all the cardamom. [They have] burned the cardamom plantations almost every dry season. So usually we don’t get anything from planting cardamom.”

– Naw Y--- (female, 52), K--- village, Toungoo District (April 2006)

“When the DKBA were blocking [travel routes] this time, it was only them and not the SPDC. When they were blocking, they also planted landmines along the way to plantations, paddy fields and betel leaf plantations and also in the banana plantations.”

– Naw K--- (female, 50), K--- village, Thaton District (July 2006)

The destruction of the rural subsistence base in areas outside of military control has formed part of the wider campaign of forcing all civilians into military-controlled villages and relocation sites where they can be subject to regular demands for labour, food and other supplies. The SPDC has treated agriculture, like all aspects of life in Karen State, as having the potential to be either a threat or a reinforcement to continued military rule. Where agriculture is subservient to military control, with a large portion of its produce going to feed local army units and profit the broader structures of military power, it is clearly supportive. Where agricultural produce allows villagers to sustain themselves while evading military control – as occurs in many of the more mountainous areas of Karen State – it is a threat to SPDC rule and thus a strategic target for military attacks.

“The soldiers went in to the villagers’ houses and searched. They came to my house and took my tools that I used for my agriculture such as the instruments that are used to measure salinity, awls, chisels and everything. They didn’t leave anything for me. They also went into the

⁷⁷ A cash crop which can be grown in forest clearings, often planted by displaced villagers when growing rice is not feasible.

villagers' houses and slashed the round bamboo baskets in which people store paddy. They slashed them again and again till they were satisfied. People told them this would break the basket, but they didn't listen."

– Naw K--- (female, 50), K--- village, Thaton District (July 2006)

Plantations and agro-business

By citing figures of the vast acreage newly put under cultivation, the SPDC has presented the expansion of plantations and agricultural land as evidence of the success of its development policy. The implication is that the land, formerly unused wasteland, has now been made productive and economically beneficial to the nation. In the areas of southern Karen State where the SPDC has largely consolidated military control, such programmes have mostly involved large-scale rubber cultivation and refining on land taken from the local civilian population. On February 26th 2007, the SPDC officially announced that they would work to double rubber production to 400,000 hectares in the 2007-08 fiscal year.⁷⁸ The plantations on which the regime has sought to support this expansion comprise a mix of private and military enterprises where the private sector provides the investment capital while the SPDC (through the Ministry of Agriculture) provides primarily technical assistance as well as "*assistance in land acquisition*."⁷⁹ According to U Soe Htin, general manager of Myanma Perennial Crops Enterprise, an SPDC agency created under the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation,

*"a 30-year development plan launched by the government in 2001 aimed at increasing the area under rubber to 1.5 million acres... [and] rubber was mainly grown by the private sector, with the enterprise providing assistance in land acquisition and supplying seedlings and advice on cultivation techniques."*⁸⁰

⁷⁸ "Burma to step up rubber cultivation in next fiscal," *Kaladan News*, February 27th 2007. Accessed at www.burmanet.org/news/2007/02/27/kaladan-news-burma-to-step-up-rubber-cultivation-in-next-fiscal on February 28th 2007.

⁷⁹ "Rubber output expected to exceed 60,000 tonnes," *The Myanmar Times*, January 9th – 15th 2006. Accessed at <http://www.myanmar.com/myanmartimes/MyanmarTimes15-299/n017.htm> on March 1st 2007.

⁸⁰ Ibid.



An SPDC rubber plantation in Dt'Nay Hsah township, Pa'an District. The SPDC regularly forces local villagers to weed the land, clear brush and cut back branches without pay. [Photo: KHRG]

While the SPDC claims these large-scale agricultural programmes and plantations operate primarily under private ownership, such assertions are misleading. Large-scale business in Burma requires close military linkages resulting in a mix of State-owned corporations, joint military-business industries, and private initiative operating with heavy support both for and from the SPDC. The SPDC heavily subsidises ostensibly independent large-scale entrepreneurial plantations which in turn provide financial support back to the military. Since the late 1990s especially, the SPDC has pursued agricultural policies which favour private management of large areas of farmland. In return for developing a new plantation or cropland of at least 5,000 acres, the SPDC subsidises private agricultural entrepreneurs with *“30-year leases, permission to export 50% of the crop and to sell the rest within Burma, exemption from taxes and duties for machinery, insecticides, fertilisers imported for the purpose of cultivation, provision of no-cost infrastructure (roads, bridges, telecommunication, wells), [and] guarantee of loans”*.⁸¹ The result has been a prioritisation of private agro-business at the expense of local farmers. Selected lands are expropriated from villagers without payment, supporting roads built with forced labour and subsidies financed with funds extorted from the civilian population. Furthermore, in Karen State, SPDC and DKBA officers have established their own rubber, fruit, sugarcane, coconut, and cashew plantations as well as fish farms and market gardens producing various kinds of natural

⁸¹ Nancy Hudson-Rodd and Myo Nyunt. April 2001. “Control of Land and Life in Burma,” *Tenure Brief* No. 3:1-8. Land Tenure Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Accessed at http://agecon.lib.umn.edu/cgi-bin/pdf_view.pl?paperid=2580&ftype=pdf on March 1st 2007.

medicines, almost always on land confiscated from villagers without payment. Labour is usually provided through a combination of the forced labour of villagers, unpaid labour by soldiers under the officer's command, and sometimes paid labourers. Some of the food produced, particularly rice, is used to supplement the Army's rations (especially when the officers are in the habit of selling the rations for personal profit), while the remainder is sold on the market. Revenue from the sale of the produce is available for reinvestment back into the military unit or more commonly to line the pockets of local commanders.

Land confiscation

State ownership of land is a practice carried over from the socialist period under BSPP rule, but has intensified since 1988 under direct military rule.⁸² To obtain whatever land they require, military forces confiscate agricultural fields from local civilians, typically providing no compensation. Much of the land confiscation in Karen State has occurred following the expansion of SLORC/SPDC control since the early 1990's. Under Burmese law, all land officially belongs to the State and local farmers maintain only cultivation rights which may be revoked by local village and township SPDC officials.⁸³ In Karen areas where land ownership follows local customary law, the SPDC has required villagers to produce deeds verifying their legal entitlement to the land. When they cannot do so, SPDC and DKBA forces have forcibly evicted villagers from property passed down from their ancestors.

"Fifteen years ago in Pah Tun village, when the SPDC [actually SLORC at that time] started building the road, the SPDC authorities extorted the lands of the villagers in Pah Tun village. The owners of the land were A'Kah, Maung Thay Htun, Po T'Lay, Kah Yeh and Pu Duh. They extorted their land and then sold it to bosses or rich people from Dta Lu Wah. They sold it for 3,500 kyat per acre. The villagers used to plant betelnut and durian on that land. Some of them lost 15 acres, some 20 acres and some 30 acres. The SPDC told the landowners that they didn't have any title deed so they couldn't claim the land was theirs, and that the land therefore belonged to the government. Now the New Mon State Party [an armed group under a ceasefire with the SPDC] is always arguing with the village head because they want to take the villagers' land, and the SPDC authorities also say they will confiscate all land for which people don't have title deeds."

- Ko A--- (male, 36), T--- village, Dooplaya District (Dec 2006)

While SPDC and DKBA forces are able to enforce land confiscation through the threat of violence, in some cases villagers have resisted by appealing to local

⁸² Fujita and Ikuku. July 2006. "Agricultural Policies and Development of Myanmar's Agricultural Sector: An Overview," *IDE Discussion Paper*, No. 63. pp.4

⁸³ Nancy Hudson-Rodd and Myo Nyunt. April 2001. "Control of Land and Life in Burma," *Tenure Brief* No. 3:1-8. Land Tenure Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Accessed at http://agecon.lib.umn.edu/cgi-bin/pdf_view.pl?paperid=2580&ftype=.pdf on March 1st 2007.

military officials in order to retain their property. These petitions, however, have been either dismissed or ignored. Army officers deny the validity of the villagers' claims or assert that the issue is not under their jurisdiction.

"The SPDC is confiscating the land and fields of the villagers. This year in 2006, the village head and the owners of the land and fields went to them and asked for their land back, but they said they couldn't give it back. The plantation owners were T---, Maung P---, and U B---, and the field owners were B---, O---, Maung P---, P---, and W---. The owners used to plant rubber, sugar cane, sesame and other things on their land. Now the SPDC is growing paddy on some of that land. The villagers are forced to plough the fields, sow the paddy, transplant the seedlings and do the harvest for them. All of the villages around here have to do this."

– U B--- (male, 61), T--- village, Dooplaya District (Jan 2006)

Land expropriated by SPDC and DKBA soldiers is either retained for military plantations or agricultural fields, developed into military bases or new roads or sold off to private business interests. Where retained by local army units, the agricultural productivity may then directly serve to feed soldiers or be turned into larger military or military-business plantations. In some cases, where army officers have resold the confiscated land for profit, villagers have been able to raise some money themselves and then buy back land previously taken from them.

"In June 2005 DKBA [Special Battalion] #906 Column Commander Aung Soe Oo combined with the SPDC army and confiscated villagers' lands and sold them to other people for 30,000 kyat per five acres. Our villagers got 200 acres and paid that rate. They [the soldiers] ordered the villagers to plant rubber [trees]. The DKBA said the money which they got [for selling off the land] they would separate into three shares. They would give one to the SPDC, one to the KNU and keep one for themselves. The other villages' villagers came to buy the lands as well. The villagers were from Ghet Bee Ther, Noo Thay Htut, Ser Mu Tur, U Lae and eastern Ser Mu Tur. Mon and Burmese [people] came to buy those lands as well."

– Saw N--- (male, 43), P--- village, Dooplaya District (Jan 2006)

In recent years the confiscation of land has supported the SPDC's attempts to intensify rubber production. The SPDC has targeted increased rubber export as a central component of its foreign trade strategy and has thus sought to agglomerate huge tracts of land into monolithic rubber plantations. Much of the rubber cultivation occurs on military and military-business plantations recently developed in Mon and southern Karen States. According to the official media, SPDC reports have claimed that

"The area used to grow rubber in Mon State⁸⁴ increased by 27,239 acres in the four years to the end of 2004, reported Interview journal. It [sic] rubber plantations in the state covered 229,640 acres, up from 202,410 acres in 2001... The report said eight per cent of the country's rubber plantations are owned by the government and the rest are operated by the private sector."⁸⁵

In one high-profile case the SPDC confiscated 5,000 acres of land in December 2004 and forcibly evicted local residents in Bilin township of Thaton District to clear space for a vast rubber plantation operated under a joint military-business arrangement between the SPDC and Max Myanmar, a Rangoon-based company also heavily involved in high-end hotel construction. SPDC Chief of the Bureau of Special Operations #4, SPDC Lieutenant General Maung Bo and representatives of Max Myanmar travelled to the site on December 3rd 2004 where they expropriated the land. According to an official report that followed the visit

"At the briefing hall of Max Myanmar company which is engaged in growing 5000 acres of rubber in Shweyaungpya village in Bilin Township, U Zaw Zaw Chairman of the company [Max Myanmar] briefed Lt-Gen Maung Bo and party on cultivation of rubber. Lt-Gen Maung Bo urged officials concerned to extend cultivation of rubber in the interests of the State, the region and in their own. Next, they inspected rubber plantations by car. According to the rubber growing project of Max Myanmar, 1000 acres will be put under rubber in 2004-2005, 2000 acres in 2005-2006 and the remaining 2000 in 2006-2007."⁸⁶



The farmland shown in this photo was confiscated from villagers in Thaton township to make way for the vast 5,000 acre rubber plantation co-operated by the SPDC and Rangoon-based company Max Myanmar. The villagers were not compensated in any way for the confiscation of their farms or the loss of their livelihoods. [Photo: KHRG]

⁸⁴ Under SPDC designations, large parts of northern and eastern Mon State cover areas of Karen State as delineated by the KNU and the local Karen population.

⁸⁵ "Rubber plantations," *The Myanmar Times and Business Review*, July 11 - 17, 2005. Accessed at www.myanmar.com/myanmartimes/MyanmarTimes14-274/media.htm on February 8th 2007.

⁸⁶ "Lt-Gen Maung Bo inspects development undertakings in Mon, Kayin States," *New Light of Myanmar*, May 9th 2005.

Forced labour

“Our village is next to Dta Gone Daing army camp. The commander of the camp is Win Thaw. In November 2005 they ordered the villagers of K--- and S--- villages to plough fields for them. The SPDC said that they were going to grow soybean.”

– U L--- (male, 56), K--- village, Dooplaya District (Jan 2006)

Following the military confiscation of agricultural land, soldiers frequently force the former owners of the land and other local villagers to labour for military benefit. In Thaton District, for instance, SPDC personnel have forced villagers to plant coconut, sunflower, eucalyptus, cashew, teak and rubber on army plantations. This labour is uncompensated and profits serve to finance the larger military institutions or strengthen local military control by feeding troops or providing revenue through the sale of agricultural produce.

To

Chairperson

_____ Village

Reason: To carry out *loh ah pay* [forced labour]

From the village of the gentleman [village head], a person in each household must come and arrive at LIB #548 on T' Hsaw Mon, the 8th waning of the moon 1368 [2006] at 7:00 am, Sunday morning (12-11-2006), to harvest rice and bring along tools at this time. This is to inform you that you must come without fail.

Stamped,
(548) Light Infantry Battalion,
Military Operation Command
Letter serial...
Date...

Place: N' Boo
Date: 10.11.2006

Signed
Captain
Battalion Commander (representative)
(548) Light Infantry Battalion

“Our villagers have to plough and cultivate paddy at Kyaut Dtaung Plaw every year, this is land which the [SPDC] battalions confiscated from villagers. This year we have not done it yet because it is not yet time. When it is time to do flat fields [rice cultivation] we must go and do it for them again. Every village in this area has to labour according to their quota.”

– Daw N--- (female, 45), D--- village, Dooplaya District (June 2006)

The SPDC also operates a vast 5000-acre sugarcane plantation in Thaton District on land confiscated from villagers. When this land was first expropriated, soldiers forced local villagers to cut down and clear all trees, remove all stumps and then sow the land with sugarcane. Since then, villagers have had to harvest the sugarcane crops annually and then process and distil the plant into refined sugar, all without compensation.

Other forms of local military businesses include fish farming, which usually involves land confiscation and forced labour digging fishponds which are then exploited for the profit of local military officers, and brick baking businesses. For the latter, officers order their soldiers to build brick kilns and dig the clay while local villages are ordered to supply firewood by the cartload. The soldiers are then ordered to bake bricks, which officers sell in local markets for profit.

To:	<i>[Stamp:]</i>	Date: 21-12-05
Chairperson	Infantry Battalion #284	
H--- village	<i>[unclear]</i>	

To transfer the brickbaking wood for the kiln, send as many bullock carts as can be gathered from the village on 22-12-2005.

U T--- from H--- village must come to meet with the Chairperson and Battalion Commander on 22-12-2005, you are hereby informed.

[Sd.]
21-12-05

Military agro-business and local control

As the SPDC and its proxy militias confiscate more and more land in Karen State, villagers have become less able to meet their basic subsistence needs. This has made many of the strategies that villagers employ to maintain control over their homeland and resist the SPDC's abusing development schemes more difficult to sustain. Not only is local control over land a necessary component of villagers' livelihoods, but the traditional importance of land in local culture means that the forced eviction and relocation of villagers off their land has attacked their very identities and the continuation of their culture. While villagers lose control over their own livelihoods and the perpetuation of their culture, the SPDC are gaining increasing access to villagers' agricultural land commensurate with the ongoing military encroachment into Karen areas. In combination these factors have exacerbated village-level poverty and undermined local strategies to address subsistence and cultural needs and resist ongoing military abuses. Villagers have not even been able to earn money through wage labour on large-scale agricultural fields and plantations as so much of this work is forced and uncompensated. While the expropriation of civilian land and small-scale farms subsidises both the business and military elite it has systematically impoverished the larger civilian population and

brought on corresponding declines in health and education levels.

“The villagers have to do both their own work and forced labour and so they are having food problems. The villagers are in trouble now. They have come frequently to discuss this with me.”

– Daw K--- (female, 40), B--- village, Doooplaya District (June 2006)

Model villages

“While the government is making efforts for all-round development of the State, many villages have emerged as model villages across the country.”

- SPDC press statement (January 2007)⁸⁷

The forced relocation of civilians is standard SPDC policy in its efforts to reorganise the population distribution in a manner favourable to military control. The junta frequently refers to such programmes under the heading of ‘model villages’. ‘Model villages’ and other military-reorganised population centres have served various purposes. The original term ‘model village’ appears to have originated in 1988 with new policies supporting the military’s ‘Burmanisation’ programme, especially in Northern Arakan State.⁸⁸ In these cases, ethnic Burman civilians from the central plains had been sent to live in areas dominated by ethnic minority groups. In Karen State however, new military-created villages and towns are more frequently various forms of internment camps set up to house relocated villagers forcibly evicted from areas outside of consolidated SPDC control. In addition, the military has created villages built on land confiscated from communities in Karen State to construct cantonments for army personnel and their families.

Forced relocation

The establishment of forced relocation sites, army garrisons and army cantonments and the forcible relocation of civilians to these places is a central facet of the SPDC’s approach to both ‘counter-insurgency’ and development. While State rhetoric speaks of ‘model’ villages, agricultural development and combating ‘terrorists’, the real reason behind the mass relocation of the civilian population is the military’s unchanging program of expanding control over all aspects of civilian life. Rural villages that remain outside of complete military control represent pockets of potential resistance that threaten the absolute militarisation of the country and thus the strength of the regime in power. Meanwhile, villages firmly under military control can be exploited in support of

⁸⁷ “Wanin, Wanlon village in Panglong region enjoy fruits of development, Model village set up in border area,” *The New Light of Myanmar*, January 12th 2007. Accessed at <http://www.myanmar.com/newspaper/nlm/news4.html> on January 30th 2007.

⁸⁸ *Burmese Refugees in Bangladesh: still no durable solution*, Human Rights Watch, May 2000. Accessed at <http://hrw.org/reports/2000/burma/burm005-02.htm> on January 30th 2007.

both local army units as well as the larger structures of military control. Remote villages are therefore ordered to move to sites where they can be directly controlled by the Army, and villagers who evade these orders by adopting a mobile livelihood are treated as enemies of the state and shot summarily on sight.

In pursuance of the junta's militarisation agenda, SPDC and DKBA troops have therefore enforced the systematic relocation of civilians from disparate rural areas into these new 'towns', 'model villages' and relocation sites situated along motor roads or next to army bases. At the same time official spokespersons have defended such campaigns as beneficial to the local population. Using the language of development, former SPDC Prime Minister Khin Nyunt stated, in a press conference broadcast on state-controlled TV Myanmar, *"Head of State Senior Gen Than Shwe had given guidance on establishment of model villages to develop agriculture and livestock breeding through the use of modern techniques and investment in cooperation with local farmers."*⁸⁹ Villagers are never consulted on these plans, and almost always decry their implementation.

"The Burmese soldiers forced us to relocate our village to Law Maw. They began giving orders to us in March. They said we must smash our own houses. At first our villagers paid money to the soldiers so that we would not have to relocate our village, and we could still stay in our village for many days. But eventually the Operations Commander came and he said that we villagers must relocate. He gave us three days to move, and said if we did not move within three days, they would 'clear all'. If they saw people, they would shoot them, and if they found any houses, they would burn them. On April 28th, the deadline for us, they said they did not want to see any of us in our village. They forced us to relocate between Dtet Tu and Thu K'Bee villages in the plains and to enclose our homes with a fence. We didn't want to relocate there. They said we must destroy our houses. They said if our village did not obey the orders, they would burn down our homes."

– Naw M--- (female, 39), T--- village, Nyaunglebin District (April 2006)

⁸⁹ "Senior leader Khin Nyunt explains agricultural modernization," TV Myanmar, August 13th 1999. Accessed at www.ibiblio.org/obl/reg.burma/archives/199908/msg00577.html on February 8th 2007.



On April 4th 2006, in advance of the SPDC's forced relocation of villagers from Pa T'Lah, Noh Ghaw and Weh Ka Daw village tracts - including Pa T'Lah, Hee Po Der, Taw Ko Doh, Taw Ko Poh, P'Taw Aw, Htay Paw, Dah K'Lah, Weh Lah Dtaw, Thoo K'Bee, Tay Paw, and other villages - SPDC Light Infantry Battalion #439 Deputy Battalion Commander Zaw Htun issued an order for the inhabitants of these villages to move to Plaw Law Bler (also known as Law Maw or Noh Law Bler), a barren area of flat rice fields between Dteh Dtoo and Thoo K'Bee villages. At this time the SPDC posted order documents in villages stating that all houses must be dismantled within three days, after which SPDC soldiers would come to burn whatever was left. The photo above shows villagers dismantling their homes in preparation for the eviction enforced by SPDC troops. *[Photo: KHRG]*

The sites designated for the internment of relocated civilians are restricted in size and insufficient to cultivate rice or raise the animals needed to adequately sustain the residents. The military only permitted newly arriving households at Plaw Law Bler relocation site, for instance, a square plot of land 15 metres (50 feet) per side. In this space relocated villagers had to construct new homes for an extended family, leaving inadequate land for livestock or gardens. Furthermore, military personnel forced newly relocated villagers to construct perimeter fencing that effectively restricts them from travel outside without written approval from local army officers.

Date...

21.8.06

Ywa Haung
Dear chairperson

Reason: To attend the meeting

1. Dear gentleman [village chairperson], tomorrow at 8:30 am on 22.8.06, [you] must attend a meeting at (599) battalion without fail. This is to inform [you].
2. The village of gentleman must be fenced with two rows and a sentry put at every opening where villagers are going and coming. This is to inform [you].

Chairperson
Ta Gone

[Sd.]
Village Ward Peace and Development Council
Ta Gone village ward-Kyauk Gyi Township

New arrivals must compete for access to agricultural land with the original inhabitants or those relocated to the site at an earlier date. Provisions for sewage disposal are typically absent, fresh water distant and access to health care and medicine restricted, thus heightening the risk of infectious and preventable disease. Forced labour and extortion of food, finances and other supplies are standard practice. Education facilities are rarely present and those that do exist must be constructed and financed by the local civilian population. Despite such restrictions, once the military decides on a given relocation site, officers dispatch orders to village heads living in the area targeted for depopulation.

"We are faced with problems at the relocation site now. It is very hot in the day time because there are no trees or shade there. A few days ago the rain fell and everywhere became wet and muddy. We heard the SPDC soldiers would be collecting a tax of 1,000 kyat from every household each month. In our section we have five villages: Pa T'Lah, Taw Ko, Khaw, Thaw Hi Po Der, and Htee Baw Naw. Many children are feeling ill, and last night a person died. His name was U Mya Thaw, 60 years old."

– Naw M---- (female, 39), T--- village, Nyaunglebin District (April 2006)



The barren landscape of Plaw Law Bler relocation site, Nyaunglebin District where soldiers forcibly relocated villagers in April 2006. Villagers interned at Plaw Law Bler have complained about the scarcity of water, lack of arable land and movement restrictions imposed on them which prevented them from returning to cultivate their former rice fields. *[Photo: KHRG]*

Relocation orders are sometimes delivered orally at meetings with village leaders, and sometimes written and sent to village leaders or tacked to a tree in the village. In areas where villagers routinely flee any contact with the Army, no notice is given, the village is simply attacked and any villagers caught are either killed or force-marched to the relocation site. In relocation order documents, military officers threaten retaliation against those who fail to move by the specified deadline, using phrases such as 'anyone found in the village after this date will be considered as enemy'. Despite such threats, most villagers are aware of the conditions of exploitation prevalent at relocation sites and are averse to any relocation that entails a loss of both their land and their freedom, so they often resist eviction through various forms of negotiations and payments. If these strategies prove ineffective in placating the officers involved, many villagers choose to move with their communities into the surrounding forest or further to refugee camps in neighbouring Thailand.

When villagers fail to comply with relocation orders military patrols follow up on their stated threats by sweeping through the target area, attacking villages with high-powered mortars then entering to burn homes, raze fields, destroy food stores and food storage bins, all in an attempt to drive villagers to the military-controlled site. Soldiers deploy landmines in and around homes, churches, farm fields and village paths. In the course of such attacks soldiers are frequently unable to catch anyone, but they continue to patrol the area with orders to shoot on sight so those who have fled into hiding must always avoid

the constant risk of military detection.

"We are faced with a big problem now that we are displaced because we are afraid of the SPDC soldiers. We dare not go back to retrieve our food in the day time so we must go back at night time. Many people are ill; especially the children who are worse off than the adults. We will face more problems in our future because the SPDC soldiers are coming to invade us. We could not burn off our little hill fields yet and if the rain continues falling we will not be able to burn them anymore. The SPDC never helps us with anything, they come to persecute and torture us. If they find anybody, they shoot both the villagers and their enemies. They do not discriminate, they shoot at everyone. Our villagers dare not meet with them, so if we hear that they are coming we must run away because they shoot at us whenever they see us."

– Saw W--- (male, 39), M--- village, Nyaunglebin District (April 2006)

Following up on their initial attacks, military units seek out and destroy covert food stores, agricultural fields and plantations in the forest and block all civilian travel and trade along nearby roadways. All of these acts serve to eliminate any means for civilians to survive in the forest, or indeed in any areas independent of military control. The options left to those villagers living in hiding are continued evasion in the forested hills, flight across the border to Thailand, or forsaking their freedom and allowing themselves to be subjugated to the ubiquitous restrictions and demands in the military-controlled villages and relocation sites.

Garrison villages and land confiscation

Aside from relocation sites, the term 'model village' in Karen State has also been used to refer to sites from which local villagers have been evicted by military forces to make way for new Army bases, with adjacent land offered to soldiers and their families. In late 2006, for example, SPDC Light Infantry Battalions #547, 548 and 549 forcibly evicted a community of Burmese Muslims from their homes in Dt'Nay Hsah village, Pa'an District.⁹⁰ Local SPDC personnel ordered the Muslim community of Dt'Nay Hsah, comprising 200 households, to leave their village following the rice harvest occurring in November. The SPDC had arranged for the confiscated land to be developed into an army base with an adjacent residential area for soldiers' families.

"The [SPDC] leaders in Pa'an came to tell us that they will make development for our community and establish a town... Our biggest problem is that the SPDC has encroached onto our lands saying that they will establish a town in Dta Greh. The SPDC said 'all lands belong to the government, [it] does not belong to the civilians, so we can

⁹⁰ For more information please see *Forced Labour, Extortion, and Festivities: The SPDC and DKBA burden on villagers in Pa'an District*, (Karen Human Rights Group, December 2006).

encroach as we wish.' Now they have already confiscated two of the flat [irrigated paddy] fields... They plan to take about one hundred acres of land from the civilians. After they take the land many problems will follow for our civilians because civilians will have no land to work for their livelihood."

- Pu T--- (male, 63), D--- village, Pa-an District (Nov 2005)

"In 2004, [SPDC] Battalion #642 confiscated 5-6 paddy fields from us P'Nweh Pu villagers as ordered by their superiors. Then they forced the owners of the land to move to another village. They confiscated the land and constructed the military camp. They were constructing the buildings on their own and baking the bricks on their own. The Battalion #642 Commander is U Khin Maung Win. We felt uncomfortable when they did this to us, but we couldn't do anything. When they decide to take your land, they summon you and they say this or that land doesn't belong to you anymore. Then they forced us to sign their book which said, 'I feel comfortable about giving my land to the SPDC.'"

- U K--- (male, 50), T--- village, Papun District (April 2006)

The military has also on occasion sold off expropriated land to private businesses and other interests. In this way military officers and state surveyors can exploit the law assigning ownership of all land by the State to make large profits in the name of 'development'. Soldiers or surveyors mark off pieces of land, often fields along new roadways, tell villagers it is no longer theirs, then reparcel it into fixed-size blocks which are then sold off to whoever comes up with the price, usually investors from town. In some cases the former owners of the lands have been permitted to buy back their property at a price set by army officials, but many farmers cannot gather enough money to do this.

"They confiscated the villagers' land and the owners reported it so that they would give it back to the owners, but they didn't even repay the cost. At first, before they ploughed the villagers' land, they said that they would give the owners 8,000,000 kyat and some villagers were told they would get 100,000,000 kyat. But later they didn't give any kyat to the owners and it has already been two to three years... The lands that they took from the villagers and on which they built have now already become like a town. They did this for their own families and it has benefited them. They called this place B'Yih Naung Garrison. At this place, there are the soldiers' wives and children, an airport [possibly a helipad] and a military training centre starting from NCO training up to lieutenant training. They also have bullet and gun stores and there are many [cement] buildings. This place was at the side of Than Daung [Gyi town]."

- Saw E--- (male, 22), G--- village, Toungoo District (2006)

"This year in 2006, Column Commander Aung Soe Oo from DKBA #906 [Battalion] combined with the SPDC Army to confiscate villagers' land and sell it to other people. They sold it at 30,000 kyat for five acres. Our villagers bought back 200 acres at that price. People from other villages

came to buy land as well – villagers from Kya Bee Ther, Nu Than Htut, Hser Mu Ter, U Lay and eastern Hser Mu Ter. Some Mon and Burmans came to buy the land as well. The DKBA said they will separate the money they get into three shares – one for the SPDC, one for KNU and one for themselves. They also ordered the villagers to plant rubber.”

– N--- (male, 43), village head, P--- village, Waw Raw township

In a typical example, on September 2nd 2005 a group of 30 officials led by Nay Zaw, the SPDC's surveyor for Hla Mine township in southern Mon State, and the Company Commander and Deputy Company Commander from Weh K'Li Army camp, came with the VPDC chairman to Weh K'Li village just southeast of Thanbyuzayat. The group measured off much of the villagers' land and later confiscated it without compensation. The same was done in Dta Gone Dtaing village west of Kya In Seik Gyi in southern Karen State. On the same day, Nay Zaw led another group that confiscated 123 acres of land from villagers in Anan Gwin village in Waw Raw (Win Yaw) township, then on September 8th they confiscated an additional 123 acres from people in Beh La Mu village just northeast of Hla Mine. All of this land was sold on the market for personal profit by surveyor Nay Zaw, the Village Peace & Development Council chairman of the various villages (demonstrating that not all VPDC heads are sympathetic to their villagers), and local military officers. To prevent their land also being confiscated, ten of the farmers in Anan Gwin village pooled together 335,000 kyat and gave it to VPDC chairman U Aung Thein to bribe the surveyor and the military officers. In some villages, people have to pay 5,000 kyat per field to the Surveyor to prevent their land being confiscated. The Surveyor promises to provide receipts but thus far he never has.

“The SPDC is confiscating the land and fields of the villagers. This year in 2006, the village head and the owners of the land and fields went to them and asked for their land back, but they said they couldn't give it back. The plantation owners were T---, Maung P--- and U B---, and the field owners were B---, O---, Maung P---, P--- and W---. The owners used to plant rubber, sugar cane, sesame and other things on their land. Now the SPDC is growing paddy on some of that land. The villagers are forced to plough the fields, sow the paddy, transplant the seedlings and do the harvest for them. All of the villages around here have to do this.”

– U B--- (male, 61), T--- village, Doooplaya District (Jan 2006)

In northern Karen State, villagers have learned from SPDC officers and escaped porters that the SPDC is planning several 'model towns' in areas it has previously had difficulty controlling. In every case these are to be centred around existing SPDC garrisons. Most of the civilians have already fled the villages surrounding these garrisons to escape forced labour, but the SPDC hopes to force everyone from the surrounding hills down into relocation sites built around the garrison where they can then be exploited for labour, food and materials. Two of these planned 'towns' are at Mu Theh and Pwa Ghaw, both SPDC camps along the road crossing northern Karen State from Kyauk Kyi to Saw Htah and both surrounded by good potential rice land which villagers previously abandoned. Other planned 'new town' sites are reportedly centred

on the SPDC garrisons at Bu Sah Kee in southern Toungoo District, Tha Pyay Nyunt in northern Nyaunglebin District, and Ma Taw south of Papun town.⁹¹ These plans appear to be more ambitious than the normal SPDC relocation sites, with the intent being to establish town-sized entities with battalion-sized garrisons which would control trade and livelihoods and radiate state power throughout the surrounding hills.

Forced labour and extortion

Those villagers evicted from their former homes and forcibly detained in military-controlled relocation sites must manage their livelihoods under daily demands for extortion payments and labour within the already restrictive conditions of the new sites. Once interned, soldiers use the threat of force to exploit labour, food, money and other supplies from villagers. In effect, such relocation sites act as reserves of exploitable labour and resources that officers and soldiers can tap to support the expanding military presence. As army patrols establish satellite camps away from the larger and more consolidated bases, civilians at relocation sites can also be used as forced labour porters and guides for units setting out to flush villagers out of the hills.



SPDC Tactical Operations Command #2 commander Aung Kyaw Nyein inspects villagers doing forced labour building a brick wall around the village football ground in Kya In Gyi village of Kya In Seik Gyi township. Throughout 2006, Aung Kyaw Nyein was responsible for ordering many kinds of forced labour like this, and was also behind orders for villagers throughout the district to plant dry season paddy crops and castor bean for the Army. [Photo: KHRG]

⁹¹ See *SPDC forces attack rice harvest to force villagers into 'new towns'*, (Karen Human Rights Group, November 2006).

“On May 12th 2006, SPDC Infantry Battalion #30 demanded 200 large pieces of bamboo from our village. Each piece of bamboo had to be 14 cubits [6.4 m / 21 ft] long and two hand spans [45.72 cm / 18 inches] in circumference. The SPDC army will build a rice barn and repair their camp. The commander wrote a letter to the village head and the village head then asked the villagers. The commander said if the villagers did not obey him, he would come and take action. So, the villagers were afraid of him and they did as he ordered.”

– Naw K--- (female, 52), T--- village, Papun District (May 2006)

Meanwhile, villages considered to be under sufficient military control are not forcibly relocated, but in many areas they have been ordered to fence themselves in similarly to a relocation site. They are told these fences are required to prevent ‘insurgents’ entering their village, but in practice the fences are used by the military to monitor and restrict the villagers’ movements and to close off villages when raiding them for forced labourers. People in these villages are usually required to carry passes in order to go outside the fence and may be subject to dusk-to-dawn curfews.

“If we want to return to our old village we must get a document from them [SPDC] and we can return only during the daytime. They said that if they saw us in the night time they would shoot us. The place to which we have relocated now is a two-hour walk from our old village.”

– Naw M---- (female, 39), T--- village, Nyaunglebin District (April 2006)

“The SPDC has been blocking villagers from going anywhere. If villagers want to go anywhere they must go to the SPDC soldiers and to get a travel pass for 300 kyat each. If an SPDC soldier sees you and checks you and if you have no travel pass, they take all of your property and then let you go away.”

– Saw B--- (male, 38), Y--- village, Toungoo District (Jan 2006)

If military units are unable to secure an exploitable civilian population, troops are unable to remain in the new satellite camps and bases. They must therefore return, forsaking military control and allowing local villagers some respite from attacks. Villagers who have succeeded in evading capture use such periods to return to tend neglected crops, access food stores left near their abandoned villages, educate their children and seek out health treatment from cross-border medical teams. In contrast, where the military has succeeded in destroying all means of remaining alive in the hills outside of their control and interning a sufficient proportion of civilians in easily accessible relocation sites, not only must villagers engage in the types of forced labour described above and provide food and money to local military personnel, but in addition they must labour on military decreed ‘development’ projects within their new ‘villages’. Such projects include constructing fences around the internment site, clearing excess forest growth, constructing homes and other buildings for soldiers, officers and their families and building clinics, schools and libraries for which the SPDC provides little or no support.



These photos show bamboo and thatch being brought and piled at a village in southwestern Papun District for transport to the nearby Wah Mu army camp as ordered by SPDC commander Yan Naing Soe in late July 2006. The villages around Wah Mu were ordered to provide between 300 and 500 bamboo poles, each with a circumference of two handspans, and between 100 and 1,000 shingles of thatch. Yan Naing Soe claims that it is needed to ‘repair the camp’, but the massive quantities he demands on a regular basis indicate that he is selling most of it for his own profit. *[Photos: KHRG]*



Contained communities and military control

While the SPDC presents the various relocation sites and new army communities as development successes where life is positively reconstructed under military decree, for villagers they are little other than repressive detention centres. The SPDC has moreover applied the same containment measures to civilian communities living in tightly controlled villages that aren't serving as relocation sites. In both cases, those inside have their movements restricted and must spend a large portion of their labour in support of the military that seeks to control them. Such restrictions and demands undermine their day-to-day livelihoods, thereby entrenching poverty, exacerbating the likelihood of illness and disease and stunting the long-term physical, social and educational health of the community. Aware of the restrictions, demands and resulting impoverishment enforced on those living with these contained communities, villagers' primary resistance strategy has been to evade the military personnel enforcing relocation orders by fleeing into the surrounding hills. While conditions in such 'hiding sites' impose severe challenges on villagers' health and livelihood, these communities are nevertheless able to continue life outside of oppressive military control and thereby maintain their dignity despite the difficulties they face. As forest cover and topography vary across Karen State however, villagers do not always have the option to live in hiding and the SPDC is therefore able to inter them in relocation sites and other contained communities. Any 'development' programmes that the SPDC implements in these places are little more than military control strategies issued by fiat and enforced on the civilian population. Prohibitions against freely accessing agricultural land combined with military restrictions and demands limits the possibilities of any independent improvement of their lives.

In relocation sites the situation is made worse by the postage stamp land allocations where villagers must construct new homes and whatever gardens can fit. Most livestock must be left behind at their former villages. Any animals which they may have been able to bring along are only able to graze and forage under and around the homes, as they no longer have access to the larger pasture land and communal grazing that previously sustained them.

"Some of the villagers reared bullocks and cows [at their former village] and they have had to construct their houses in the new relocation site and keep their animals in their old village. But their cows were lost when they went back to get them."

- Saw P--- (male, 51), G--- village, Papun District (Aug 2006)

The army furthermore allows no villagers to leave the confines of relocation sites or other tightly controlled villages without a written travel document issued by the local village head or commanding officers. Villagers must typically pay at least 500 kyat – although this fee is at the discretion of the issuing officer and differs from region to region – for such passes and their validity typically lasts for only a few days. As a consequence of such restrictions on movement, villagers at relocation sites are usually unable to maintain the agricultural fields

left behind at their former homes, which are left to rot or be ravaged by wild animals or weeds no longer kept at bay by the farmers. Even new fields set up near to relocation sites cannot be adequately maintained as soldiers restrict access even to these, prohibiting villagers from working from and spending the night at farm field huts and thus limiting the success of the harvest. Movement restrictions also hamper both relocated villagers and those in heavily controlled villages from foraging for wild foods or firewood in nearby forests or venturing further to trade at larger villages and towns.

[Stamp:]
Township Peace & Development Council
Kawkareik Township

Township Peace & Development Council
Kawkareik town, Karen State
Letter No. 4 / 1-1 / Oo 1
Date: 2005 June 27th

To: Chairpersons
All Ward / Village Tract Peace & Development Councils
Kawkareik township

Subject: The matter of temporary huts in flat [irrigated rice] fields

1. In every township of Karen State it is known that temporary huts have been built in the flat fields, so they must be dismantled. If this order is not obeyed, action will be taken under the law in accordance with State Peace & Development Council letter number 5 / 2-17 / Oo 6 dated 22-6-2005, [you are] informed.
2. Therefore if any temporary huts have been built in the flat fields of the ward / village tract they must be dismantled. If this is not obeyed, action will be taken in accordance with the law, [you are] informed.

[Sd.]
(for) Chairperson
(Nyunt Oo, Secretary)

Copies:

- Township supervisor, township land survey department, Kawkareik town		This letter is sent to ensure control and see that there are no temporary huts being built.
- Manager, Myanmar Agricultural Production, Kawkareik town		
- File / Receipt		

This order was issued right at the beginning of the cropping season, when the villagers need their huts the most. 'Action will be taken' means the Army will destroy the huts and possibly fine or punish their owners.

"We villagers are forbidden from going out even just to collect firewood and collect leaves for making roofs. So, some of the villagers have had to buy them from Yay Cha Chut Hsee Gone to make their roofs. This was very expensive. One hundred shingles of leaves was sold for 5,000 kyat. Before, we could collect them by ourselves and we didn't need to spend any money for them. But now if we don't buy [them], we can't repair the roofs and we have to stay in the rain."

– Saw P--- (male, 40), T--- village, Toungoo District (April 2006)

Date 4.12.2006

Stamped
(68) Light Infantry Battalion
Battalion office
Letter #...

Date...

To

Chairperson
Mih Kyaw Win village

Reason: Let know and inform to villagers

1. Villagers who live in the gentleman's [village head's] village ward must sleep in the villages after December 15th and people are not permitted to sleep in the hill-fields.
2. After a limited time if Tatmadaw columns encounter [villagers] and fire [at them], [I] cannot take responsibility for that issue, and if [the soldiers] find villagers who sleep in the hill-field at night time they will take action. This is to inform you.

Signed
Camp commander
Win Maw camp

Even where the army allows villagers at relocation sites to maintain new farm fields land is in short supply and new villagers must compete with older ones for access to arable fields. Restrictions on travel obstruct civilian access to agricultural fields and external health and education facilities and undermine trade and other economic opportunities. The lack of resources in combination with military restrictions means life in relocation sites is untenable. As it becomes evident that relocated communities cannot possibly sustain themselves under such conditions, villagers have often been able to exploit the logistical limitations of relocation sites in order to negotiate with local army officers and persuade them to relax restrictions, thereby allowing villagers to return to their original homes and farm fields. Given this strategy, should international humanitarian agencies attempt to provide aid under SPDC authority into relocation sites they risk making the sites artificially sustainable, and thereby condemning the villagers to continued internment under tight restrictions. Were international agencies to provide food, for example, under SPDC supervision into these sites, villagers would be unable to appeal on the basis of food shortages for a relaxing of restrictions. Conversely, were international agencies to provide food or other assistance covertly, relocated villagers could still push local officials into relaxing restrictions on the grounds of food shortages while nonetheless accessing clandestine aid. In this way, such agencies could remain faithful to an ethical imperative of providing humanitarian assistance, without prolonging the life of relocation sites and restricting the options of those interned therein. The deciding factor is whether aid increases or limits the choices available to the villagers; any aid which reduces their choices does more harm than good.

Education

"The Ministry of Education has been carrying out development tasks of the basic education sector since 1998 and the higher education sector since 1996. In so doing, tasks of region-wide human resources development were undertaken in line with short-term and long-term plans. In the basic education sector, opening of new schools, upgrading of school buildings, enrolment of school going age children and opening of post-primary schools were included in the plans."

- SPDC Deputy Minister for Education U Myo Nyunt (April 2006)⁹²

"The villagers built the school but then the SPDC changed its name so that it would be their [an SPDC] school."

- Naw S--- (female, 45), H--- village, Thaton District (Nov 2005)

While the SPDC has employed the rhetoric of educational development as a legitimising tool, it has simultaneously worked to restrict educational opportunities where they are seen to threaten continued military rule. In rural Karen areas soldiers have directly obstructed education by restricting the expansion of educational facilities, prohibiting instruction in Karen language, confiscating school materials provided independent of SPDC channels and destroying schools as part of the army's mass relocation campaigns. Moreover, the military has indirectly hindered access to education through constant demands for labour, food, finances and other supplies and restrictions on travel and trade which all erode civilian livelihoods and frustrate villagers' attempts to finance their children's education.

Restrictions and obstacles to education

"There is no school in our village. It's because of the SPDC. They think that if we build schools, we will become educated. If we are educated, they know that that they cannot oppress us. They can't step on us. That is why they do not allow us to build a school."

- Ko K--- (male, 45), H--- village, Papun District (June 2000)

In regions outside of military control, soldiers regularly destroy schools and school supplies as part of their efforts to force villagers to move to military-controlled areas. As villagers living beyond the reach of direct military control are seen as subversives and enemies of the state, soldiers target their schools and other community structures during armed attacks in order to destroy these important symbols of community and continuity. Having fled these assaults villagers work to re-establish schools in their various hiding sites, although this becomes exceedingly difficult as military patrols target all villagers residing within such areas in search-and-destroy missions. Displaced communities in the forest prioritise the continuation of education as a means of maintaining a

⁹² SPDC Press Conference, April 27th 2006. Accessed at <http://www.myanmar.com/pressconference/index.html> on March 2nd 2007.

sense of community and dignity in the face of ongoing military attacks and the challenges of life in hiding. Nevertheless, many families require their children to assist with their livelihood as the pressures of displacement severely threaten food security.

"Because the parents fled to different places [in the forest] it has been difficult to organise [a way for] the students to study. But we don't know when the SPDC soldiers will withdraw so we have had to organise it [the school in the forest] and now all of the students have a chance to study."

– Naw H--- (female, 36), school principal,
K--- village, Nyaunglebin District (July 2006)

"Because the SPDC is active near my neighbours' village we have had to flee from our village. The school year is not finished yet so the children have had to continue their schooling under the trees in the jungle."

– Saw L--- (male, 59), L--- village, Lu Thaw township (January 2007)

In other areas where Karen organisations and local community groups support village education independent of SPDC structures, SPDC and DKBA soldiers confiscate school materials, limit the level of education that may be provided and restrict who may teach. In some cases local SPDC officers have blocked communities from expanding their schools to provide education beyond the primary level or fined them after the fact.



Thirteen-year-old Naw G--- from B--- village, Papun District helping her family by milling rice. Although she would like to study, the regular threat of SPDC forces has led her parents to flee into hiding where they face increased pressure on their livelihood. Naw G--- must therefore spend more time on household activities and says, *"My mother sent me to school but we had to flee again and again so my mother asked me to help out with housework and work in the fields."* [Photo: KHRG]

"This year we haven't got any donated books or pens because all of the notebooks that were prepared to distribute to the children were taken by Moe Kyo [2nd commander of DKBA battalion #333]... If they [DKBA soldiers] are in the village, they don't allow the students to come to school and they enter into the school. It also disturbs the students a lot in studying. If they enter any village, they camp in the schools so the students can't go to school."

– Saw S--- (male, 38), M--- village, Thaton District (July 2006)

“Because we raised the grade of this school to grade five this year the SPDC demanded 10,000 kyat from us when we went and told them about it.”

– Naw L--- (female, 34), T--- village, Dooplaya District (Jan 2006)

“When the DKBA soldiers entered the village, the students couldn’t go to school because they [the DKBA soldiers] rested and stayed in the school. They didn’t allow the students to come to school and they forced the teachers to close the school so the students couldn’t go to school.”

– Naw K--- (female, 50), K--- village, Thaton District (July 2006)



These students from W--- village, Dweh Loh township travel through the forest to attend school in another area after SPDC officer Htun Aung would not allow their village to open a middle school in early 2006. The teachers in W--- village wanted to provide education up to the 7th standard so that the students would not have to travel elsewhere to attend middle school, but SPDC Infantry Battalion #30 officer Htun Aung forbade them and said that he would destroy the school if they did so. [Photo: KHRG]

In situations where military personnel restrict the permissible curriculum in a given village, students must walk to neighbouring villages in order to attend schools providing anything beyond primary education. Children making these arduous journeys face risks of landmines deployed along forest paths as well as harassment and attacks by soldiers. Parents, in concern for their children, may therefore forbid them from making such trips. Those wishing to continue to secondary ‘high school’ education must go to SPDC-controlled towns, which require parents to pay not only the very high school fees and cost of educational materials, but boarding costs as well. Most farming villagers cannot afford these costs. Middle and secondary schools in SPDC-controlled towns have also occasionally been raided to obtain Army porters or recruits, so

they are not safe, particularly for children from remoter areas. Many parents choose instead to send their children to study at refugee camps in Thailand, where they pay no fees, are boarded at lower cost to the family and can live free from the threat of SPDC forces.

"Parents who will send their daughters to school in other places first look for a good school and good security for their daughter. The parents also don't want to send their daughters to go far away from their village to find money. Married women say that if they send their daughters, they will get very worried. So, they don't dare to send their daughters to go far away because of the lack of security for women."

– Naw S--- (female, 22), N--- village, Thaton District (Sep 2006)

In the official state curriculum the SPDC propagates its vision of a hierarchical society led and unified by the military. Karen and other ethnic languages are prohibited from being taught in schools as part of the SPDC's 'Burmanisation' campaign and Christian teachers have on occasion been barred from teaching. Military authorities thus work to systematically eradicate at the roots all independent and critical thought, or indeed any deviation from the official discourse, as it threatens to promote resistance to continued military rule.

"The students in the school are not taught Karen. They can't learn Karen as a subject in the school because they don't have any teacher to teach Karen and we are also not allowed to learn Karen. The SPDC doesn't allow us to learn Karen in school because they want to wipe away the Karen literature and language."

– U T--- (male, 58), W--- village, Doooplaya District (June 2006)

Forced construction of schools and libraries

"They [the SPDC] don't do anything for us. We had to build the school ourselves. The SPDC Army camp is close to us and they came and saw that we were building the school ourselves, but they didn't do anything to help. They don't do anything for us. We have to rely on each other. We never have enough for our school. The SPDC knows that we need help, but they don't do anything for us."

– Saw Y--- (male, 35), village head, G--- village, Toungoo District (Dec 2002)

While enforcing restrictions on schools in rural Karen areas, SPDC officials simultaneously celebrate the junta's promotion of education across the country. Military authorities exhort the importance of education in rural areas and furthermore stress the exponential improvements in quality and availability of educational facilities which they claim have already been achieved. In October 2006, SPDC Senior General Than Shwe claimed that, *"In implementing the rural areas development tasks, it is needed to step up efforts for promotion of education and health sectors in rural areas."*⁹³ Nevertheless, villagers in rural

⁹³ Quoted in "Development of a country depends on progress of rural areas, and development of urban areas are underpinned by economic infrastructures in rural areas Senior General Than

Karen State have described a different scenario; one where any advancement in education depends on the independent efforts of local communities.



This photo of Kway Lay school in Bilin township, Thaton district was taken on May 26th 2005. The villagers were forced to provide all the materials and build the school, then to pay for all of its running costs, yet the SPDC calls it a government-supported school and claims credit for it. [Photo: KHRG]

In some cases villagers have come together to finance and construct a school to meet community needs. Following the construction of schools, SPDC officials often turn up for a brief opening ceremony involving photo sessions and speeches by men in military dress for distribution across the country in the State-controlled media. In these speeches, the officials claim all credit for establishing the school and lecture the villagers on their great indebtedness to the State and their duty to raise children who will be good servants of the State. In Pa'an township of Thaton District, for instance, one KHRG field researcher observed in 2006 how villagers in one community

"...collected money and co-operated to construct a school for the children to study. After the villagers finished constructing the school SPDC troops came and took pictures of the school for the SPDC Education Department. They then reported [to the education department] that they had done these projects in Karen State; that they had developed the villages to improve the villagers and they showed the pictures of the villagers' school and said that it was the schools that they

Shwe attends Meeting No 1/2006 of Central Committee for Development of Border Areas and National Races," *The New Light of Myanmar*, October 4th 2006.

had built for the villagers. They reported to the headquarters of the education minister that they had spent so much money in order to build schools. They got the amount of money that they had reported [reimbursed] from the education minister and used it for themselves.”

- KHRG field researcher, Thaton District (2006)

In order to sustain the show of educational development, military officers and state officials have in other cases forced villagers to construct schools and library buildings while providing no financial or in-kind support. Villagers have had to supply their own materials, labour and money, and furthermore take time away from cultivating their fields.

“They also forced the villagers to build a library, but they didn’t give us wood, bamboo, nails or other things that we needed to construct the building. They gave us some books to keep in the library, but as of now they haven’t told us about the cost. If we have to pay them money for the books that they gave us, we will have to give it to them because we are afraid of them.”

U B--- (male, 61), T--- village, Dooplaya District (January 2006)

“The SPDC Operations Commander ordered the villagers to construct a library in each village. There were 128 villages that were ordered to construct libraries. They gave 85 books to each big village, and 25 to 75 books to each small village. They said that if the villagers read the books, we will get more knowledge and improve our lives too. We already received the books they sent to keep in the library. Most of the books were [magazines] about Burmese actors and actresses. We had to buy a library signboard from the SPDC for 5,000 kyat. We haven’t given them that money yet and we thought about making the signboard ourselves. Most of the villagers don’t read or write Burmese, and many find reading books boring.”

- Naw M--- (female, 47), T--- village, Dooplaya District (January 2006)

Township Peace and Development Council
Kya-In Seik Gyi Township, Kya-In Seik Gyi town
Letter # 2/3-77/people 5 ()
Date... 9, December 2005 (year)

Stamped
Township Peace and Development Council
Kya-In Seik Gyi Township
Letter #...
Date...

To

Chairperson
T--- village
Kya-In Gyi village ward, Kya-In Seik Gyi Township

Reason: To conduct the opening ceremony for the library in the village

Purpose: Township Peace and Development Council, Kya-In Seik Gyi township on the date of (17-11-2005) and letter # 2/3-77/ people 5 (640)

1. Villagers in Kya-In Seik Gyi township can read and study so that their knowledge will increase step by step according the guidance from the high authority and every village must conduct an opening ceremony for the library in the village in December 2005. The library must be opened and the signboard for the library must be completely finished by (25-11-2005). Regarding that issue [I] have already informed [the village] but the village which is named at the top did not see the letter about it.
2. Therefore, for your village the opening ceremony of the library and the making of the signboard must be finally finished on (10-12-2005) [you] must report to this office without fail and [I] inform you again.

Signed
9.12.2005
Chairperson
(Yeh Tun, Bp / 3538)

Copy-

Strategic Operation group (base) Kya-In Seik Gyi town
Information reply and civilians contacting administration department, Kya-In

Seik Gyi town

"We have a school in the village. The school was established by the villagers and has now become an SPDC school. After the SPDC took over control they ordered us to do many things such as to repair the school every year and to make opening and closing ceremonies but [we] did not see them help with anything. Our school teaches up to grade four with three teachers and over 70 or 80 students. This year the SPDC has not helped us with the salaries of the teachers, we have to support each teacher with 50 baskets of paddy. Students have to buy books for themselves and they don't receive any support. Two years ago students could study Karen language but this year the SPDC is not allowing teachers to teach Karen language."

- Ko M--- (male, 40), D--- village, Dooplaya District (June 2006)

After the forced construction of schools, SPDC authorities cite these buildings in official statistics listing them as State initiatives, during press conferences and meetings with governments and international agencies. Furthermore, according to the SPDC many of the new rural schools in the ethnic minority areas, including Karen State, were developed jointly with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UNICEF. If this is the case, it implies that UN funds were diverted by the SPDC while the money and resources for these projects were extorted from local villagers.

"In education sector, the government built 852 primary schools, 90 middle schools and 92 high schools. Moreover, it also built 491 schools and renovated 546 schools in Kachin, Kayin [Karen], Chin, Mon and Rakhine States in cooperation with UNDP under the far-flung township development project...Textbooks were distributed to students in border areas free of charge under the border area and national races development work committee and UNICEF."

- SPDC spokesperson (October 2006)⁹⁴

"We have one primary school in our village. This school was constructed earlier by the villagers on their own, but later the SPDC came and labelled it as their school."

- Saw K--- (male, 40), E--- village, Thaton District (Feb 2006)

Under-funding of rural schools

Where schools are built by villagers, whether forcibly under military directives or independently on their own initiative, the SPDC rarely provides financial or material support for the ongoing provision of education. Teachers sent by the SPDC usually receive salaries from the state, but villagers are expected to supplement this with rice and food. Few or no other funds or materials are provided, despite the fact that villagers must pay school fees for each child in any level of school. If funds are allocated from the ministry level, it is clear that they are all embezzled before they can filter down to village schools.

Occasionally the SPDC has assigned teachers to the new schools, but these comprise mostly ethnic Burmans from the larger towns who are unfamiliar with the local culture and unable to speak any Karen languages. As the pay is low and the local culture and language often unfamiliar, these teachers frequently abandon their posts soon after beginning in order to return home to the towns from whence they came. Local communities therefore usually have to provide and support their own teachers. For one teacher, villagers must supply an average of 50 baskets of rice per year. The long standing repression and restrictions on education in Karen State mean that many of these teachers have

⁹⁴ Quoted in "Development of a country depends on progress of rural areas, and development of urban areas are underpinned by economic infrastructures in rural areas Senior General Than Shwe attends Meeting No 1/2006 of Central Committee for Development of Border Areas and National Races," *The New Light of Myanmar*, October 4th 2006.

not even finished primary school themselves. While boarding schools exist in some of the towns, these are prohibitively expensive and very few rural villagers can afford them. While sending their children to study in their home villages is more affordable for villagers, as a consequence of military extortion, forced labour and other demands families nevertheless require their children to look after younger siblings or assist in the family's livelihood. Parents may therefore allow their youngest children to attend school for a few years but then take them out of class when they are old enough to contribute to the family's labour.

"In our village there are some children that couldn't attend school because their parents couldn't send them to school and they have to work to help their parents. We have one widow in our village and she couldn't send her children to school because she is now getting old and she needed someone to work for her."

– Naw K--- (female, 50), K--- village, Bilin township (July 2006)

"70-80% of the children go to school. The students who finish grade eight and want to continue to grade nine or ten, they go to Papala, but very few of them have gone there because it costs too much money. It costs 250,000 kyat for one student. Most of them help their parents in doing flat field or hill field [rice cultivation] after grade eight."

– Saw L--- (male, 43), village head, H--- village, Dooplaya District (Dec 2005)

In rural areas of Karen State there are three main types of schools distinguished by their source of funding and support, namely community schools, SPDC schools and missionary schools. The first group are those schools initiated and supported primarily by the local community. These schools exist where local villagers organise, construct and support the school independent of outside agents. Often these schools are organised through the local monastery or church. The KNU, via the Karen Education Department (KED), provides additional support for community schools, mostly in the form of textbooks, notebooks, pencils and other school equipment or food and occasionally salaries for the teachers. Even where some support is provided it often falls short of requirements, thus requiring that villagers supply additional funding in cash or in kind for the school.

"We have a school in our village. This school runs until Sixth Standard [grade six]. The school was constructed by the villagers on their own. We got teachers from our own village and the headmaster was from another village. The villagers pay the teachers by themselves and each of the teachers is given 50 baskets of rice per year. We have six teachers, three of them are paid by the villagers and the other three are supported by the KNU. The school admission fee for each of the students is 500 kyat and the school expenses per student are two baskets of paddy and four bowls of rice. We have to give rice to all the six teachers, but for the salary the other three teachers are paid by the KNU."

– Naw K--- (female, 50), K--- village, Thaton District (July 2006)

The second group of schools are those that get funding via the SPDC. The SPDC labels most schools existing throughout Karen State as State schools, but rarely provides any actual funding or support for those in rural areas. Those schools where the SPDC does provide limited funding are typically limited to the towns. As these schools charge tuition fees ranging from 100,000 to 200,000 kyat (US\$ 80-160) per year, they are prohibitively expensive for most villagers. Moreover, teachers' salaries at these schools typically range from 40,000 to 50,000 kyat (US\$ 30-40) per year, which is inadequate to meet even basic subsistence needs. As a result, many of them cut short the regular class hours in order to allocate more time for private tutoring sessions. As official class time is shortened and teachers encourage students to attend private lessons, such extra tutoring is frequently the only means for students to learn the material necessary to pass national examinations. This extracurricular tuition can add another 10,000 kyat to the already expensive cost of sending a child to school.

"They [the SPDC] sent one teacher for each school and this teacher acts as school headmaster. The SPDC gave only one teacher for one school so the villagers have to hire the other teachers on their own. No school can teach Karen because they [the SPDC] don't allot any time to teach Karen. And the teachers from the SPDC don't exert themselves in teaching the students. They don't attend class or come to school on time. The students who finish 4th standard [the final year of primary school] and continue to high school in the town have to face money problems as well. A student has to pay 40,000 kyat just for the school admission fees. They must spend additional money for the things for school, food, uniform and other things also. So it would cost, including the school fee, 70,000 to 100,000 kyat. And they also have to study with private tutors if they continue their education in town and have to pay the fees [for the tutoring] as well. If the students don't go to the private tutorial sessions, they can't pass the exam easily. So it would cost too much money and most of the parents can't pay that, so they send their children to attend school in refugee camps."

- KHRG field researcher, Thaton District (2006)

"The construction of the high school began in 2005, but it hasn't finished yet and they said that they would finish it this year. The SPDC has called this school an 'SPDC government school', but for this school to happen, the villagers have had to work very hard. The villagers have to worry all about the situation for the teachers and the villagers have to give them food to eat. There are 20 teachers. The villagers have to give them 150 baskets of rice in a year and each student has to give them 500 kyat per month for curry and other things that they need. For one year each student must pay 300,000 kyat. If the students don't have money, it isn't easy for them to attend school. This is happening to the villagers because the SPDC doesn't give a suitable salary to the teachers."

- Saw M--- (male, 35), village secretary, L--- village, Thaton District (Jan 2006)

The third type of schools in Karen areas are various forms of missionary establishments funded by Christian groups based in Irrawaddy Division west of Rangoon. These schools have been anathema to the DKBA in particular, which is averse to Christian teachers in Karen areas. In some instances the DKBA has threatened teachers at these schools and forbidden them from continuing to teach in Karen schools.⁹⁵

Education and military control

"Students don't have good opportunities to study and cannot study the Karen language. The main subject taught in school is the Burmese language. Not all children can go to school because of the pressure of the SPDC on their parents, which makes them unable to send their children to school. Over 30 children [in the village] don't attend school now."

– Saw B--- (male, 38), Y--- village, Toungoo District (Jan 2006)

The SPDC has utilised the provision and restriction of education as well as the rhetoric of education as development as a means of extending and consolidating military control in Karen areas. By restricting the expansion of and access to educational facilities, confiscating school supplies, and destroying schools as part of forced relocation campaigns, the SPDC and sometimes the DKBA have worked to obstruct the development of education in areas not firmly under military control. The aim is to make access to even limited educational opportunities dependent on civilian compliance with military authority. The SPDC also prohibits schooling in Karen or other ethnic languages as part of its wider 'Burmanisation' agenda, a programme aiming to homogenise the population of Burma and thus undermine non-Burman calls for self-determination.

"They [the students] don't have any opportunity to learn Karen at school. So the children in the village hire special teachers to teach them Karen during their dry season holidays."

– Saw C--- (male, 45), K--- village, Doooplaya District (Dec 2005)

Meanwhile, by claiming to lead the campaign for the development of rural education the SPDC has sought to garner domestic and international legitimacy and in turn financial support. As international NGOs, UN agencies and governments are eager to expand their operations in Burma, the control of education is particularly insidious. The UN Development Programme (UNDP), for example, which funds a variety of educational programmes such as teacher training and informal education through Community Learning Centres under the by-line of *"Improving Access of Children, Women and Men of Poorest Communities to Primary Education for All,"* is nevertheless restricted from accessing and thus implementing and monitoring their programmes in most

⁹⁵ See for example, *Oppression by Proxy in Thaton District*, (Karen Human Rights Group, December 2006).

areas of Karen State.⁹⁶ In SPDC regulations released in December 2006 covering the work of UN agencies, such restrictions were deemed necessary in order to restrict movement and prevent “*unpleasant incidents*”.⁹⁷ In this manner the SPDC is able to utilise access to UN educational programmes as yet another means of asserting military control over the civilian population. Furthermore, the use of forced labour on projects for which UN agencies may have allocated funds is particularly disquieting. Money earmarked for capital investment in rural education disappears along the corrupt channels of military bureaucracy while village forced labour facilitates consolidation of military control, and all the while both the SPDC and UN agencies continue to cite successful development programmes and congratulate each other on mutual cooperation.

"We had a school before but it was destroyed because of the increased activity of the SPDC. Our school was constructed by the KNU, but later it was burned by the SPDC. The children who are of school age now stay in the forest and a few of them have gone to a refugee camp to study."

– Saw F--- (male, 56), S--- village, Toungoo District (March 2006)

Health

"We must do 'loh ah pay' [forced labour] and pay money as they order us. Sometimes our children get sick and we have no money to buy the medicines. But if the SPDC or DKBA order us, we must find [the money] and give [it] to them."

– Naw M--- (female, 35), K--- village, Papun District (2006)

Common ailments afflicting villagers in Karen areas include malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea, dysentery, hepatitis, tuberculosis and other respiratory infections, anaemia, worms, skin disease, colds, vitamin deficiencies, digestive problems, dizziness, fatigue and depression. Epidemiological studies on the health situation in eastern Burma have found the rate of infant mortality to be 122-135 deaths per 1,000 live births and the under-five mortality rate to be 276-291 per 1,000.⁹⁸ Malaria is consistently the most common cause of death, responsible for about 41% of fatalities. The deplorable state of health among civilians in Karen areas has arisen as a corollary to the region's prolonged and increasing militarisation, the restrictions and human rights abuses accompanying this militarisation, and the poverty and food shortages created by military exploitation of the population and coercive agricultural

⁹⁶ "Myanmar: The Community Learning Centre Experience," UNESCO, 2002. Accessed at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001252/125290e.pdf> on March 2nd 2007.

⁹⁷ "Myanmar: guidelines for UN imposed for their own safety," Agence France Presse, December 18th 2006. Accessed at <http://www.burmanet.org/news/2006/12/18/agence-france-presse-myanmar-guidelines-for-un-imposed-for-their-own-safety/> on January 16th 2007.

⁹⁸ Thomas J. Lee et al. July 2006. "Mortality rates in conflict zones in Karen, Karenni and Mon states in eastern Burma," *Tropical Medicine and International Health* vol.2 (7):1119-1127.

programmes.⁹⁹ In some cases the link between human rights abuses and health is direct, as when a villager steps on a landmine laid by soldiers in a village path to prevent civilians from returning to their abandoned homes, or when forced displacement leads to high rates of child mortality and malnourishment among communities living in hiding. Even more widespread and insidious, however, are the less direct effects of abuses such as forced labour, crop confiscation, forced agricultural programmes, arbitrary taxes and restrictions on people's movements and livelihoods. Villagers often describe how cumulative abuses and restrictions work together to undermine their own strategies to address health and nutritional needs, thus making them much more vulnerable to illness, injury and malnutrition and increasing their susceptibility to disease.

"Most of the villagers don't have enough food. We can't do the cultivation well and we are always disturbed and interrupted by the SPDC. Because we don't have enough food, we have to go to Kaw Thay Der and buy rice or food. But almost all of the villagers face money problems in this way because we don't have any livelihood to earn money. The biggest problem that we have to face at present is that the food is insufficient. We don't have enough medicine when we get sick and no school or education for the children."

— Saw N--- (male, 56), K--- village, Toungoo District (March 2006)

Persistent abuses such as extortion, forced labour and restrictions on travel and trade combine to undercut villagers' livelihoods and financial base. Forced labour and restrictions on movement outside the village force people to leave crops untended, resulting in reduced harvests; military taxes and extortion then take away much of this harvest and erode their savings, which are held in the form of livestock, jewellery and rice surpluses. As a result, many villagers say they are now living from hand to mouth. When illness or injury strikes they would normally fall back on their stockpiles and savings for the period that family members are kept away from farm work to care for the sick or injured. Without those savings, however, there is no food to fall back on and no money for medical treatment. Medical treatment that may be available in the towns becomes prohibitively expensive, leaving villagers to rely on traditional herbal remedies which frequently prove insufficient.

"We have so many weaknesses in our village. ...Out of 30 households, there are about 25 households which do not have enough food. Only 3 households, very few households, have sufficient food because they have some cattle and buffaloes. But the other households just search in the morning to eat in the evening, and search in the evening to eat in the morning. They are suffering from poverty. Sometimes these people work all day, but only get enough rice for one meal and sometimes they don't even get enough food to share with their children and

⁹⁹ For further evidence of the correlation between health and human rights in eastern Burma see *Chronic Emergency: Health and Human Rights in Eastern Burma*, Back Pack Health Worker Team, 2006.

grandchildren. They have to work very hard day and night, without time to rest. ...The insufficiency of food among the villagers has been caused by sickness, 'loh ah pay' [forced labour] and the travelling [for the forced labour and meetings they are summoned to]. Both the SPDC and Nyein Chan Yay [Karen Peace Force]¹⁰⁰ summoned us. There are many demands from many armies so the villagers can't manage it all."

– K--- (male, 30), village secretary, G--- village, Dooplaya District (Dec 2006)

"We don't have a hospital or clinic in our village, but we have one nurse to whom we go when we get sick. It costs at least 2000 kyat for an injection with a syringe. Some of the people who don't have money to go to him use herbal medicine."

– U T--- (male, 54), T--- village, Dooplaya District (Jan 2006)

Villagers living in otherwise fertile areas are left without the necessary funds to buy mosquito nets or basic medicines. Forced labour and agricultural programmes such as dry season rice planting take them away from foraging or growing other foods, reducing the diversity of their diet. Nutritional needs remain unmet and no profit from trade is left for other food or medicines.

"We don't have a clinic in our village, but when we get sick we can go to T'Raw Wah. You must have at least 10,000 or 20,000 kyat to go to T'Raw Wah hospital. Most of the villagers don't have enough money so when they get sick they just stay home. Some are cured with herbal medicines, but some who are severely ill have died. This year, 2005, two people have died of paralysis. One was 4 years old and the other was 42 or 43. We tried to send them to hospital but it was too late. Once a year the Backpacks [Backpack Health Worker Teams, an independent group bringing medicines in from Thailand] come to the area around our village. Some other health workers come and give us vaccinations too. But most of the villagers just have to buy or make herbal medicines. If we have to buy [commercial] medicines, it costs 200 kyat for one tablet or 2,000 kyat for an IV drip."

– Saw L--- (male, 43), H--- village, Dooplaya District (Dec 2005)

As the SPDC brings restrictions on movement and trade, extortion and forced labour to rural areas once it gains control, the extension of SPDC military networks through Karen areas and the 'peace' and 'development' the army has brought with it have undermined both the health condition of the local population as well as the strategies they use to address their health and nutritional needs. Despite the humanitarian catastrophe that persists in eastern Burma and its relation to military abuse, the SPDC maintains in all public statements that its development policies in the region are ameliorative. The figures quoted by SPDC spokespersons suggest that since the early 1990's Karen State and other areas of Burma have made a rapid ascent to the heights of health and wellbeing.

¹⁰⁰ Karen Peace Force (KPF) is an armed group formed with SLORC/SPDC support after KNLA officer Thu Mu Heh defected in 1997; it now works as an SPDC proxy army and logs for profit.

“Malaria cases dropped to 11.1 in every 1,000 people during 2004 if compared with 24.3 in 1990. Malaria death cases were down to 3.7 per cent in every 100,000 people during 2004 compared with 12.6 during 1990. Educative talks on the disease were given to the public. Moreover, treated mosquito[sic]-nets, and medicines were distributed in rural areas.”

- SPDC Deputy Minister for Health Dr Mya Oo (April 2006)¹⁰¹

Clearly overcome by his own rhetoric, the SPDC Deputy Minister for Health has even gone so far as to report that the SPDC has found a cure for HIV:

“With the leadership of CCDAC¹⁰², the Ministry of Health was carrying out HIV prevention and treatment services [throughout] the whole country and moreover, specialists cured HIV patients in 26 major treatment centres as well as minor clinics.”¹⁰³

Despite the barrage of SPDC statements regarding the fruits of military health initiatives, local villagers claim such programmes are at best superficial, and very often harmful. World Health Organisation rankings tend to support the villagers' view as opposed to that of the SPDC Health Ministry; in 2000 the WHO ranked Burma's health care system 190th out of 191 countries in the world.¹⁰⁴ Rather than addressing the health needs of the local population the SPDC uses the rhetoric of health care to legitimise its rule and justify expanding military control further into remote areas. While the SPDC consistently presents its response to the humanitarian crisis as appropriate, according to the UNDP the regime spends less than 0.5% of GDP on health care provision.¹⁰⁵ As the UNDP gets its statistics from SPDC sources, even this figure is likely to be overstated; moreover, the amount 'spent' does not take into account the leakage of these funds to corruption before they ever reach the ground. While spending little or nothing on health, the SPDC military has attacked and destroyed civilian medical supplies and clinics and restricted any medical provision independent of SPDC structures, including barring access by international humanitarian organisations. Independent access to non-SPDC medicine and health care is targeted because it gives civilians more control over their lives and wellbeing, and greater freedom to evade military subjugation by, for example, fleeing into the forest to avoid army patrols.

¹⁰¹ “Questions and answers at the Press Conference 4/2006,” SPDC press conference, April 27th 2006. Accessed at <http://www.myanmar.com/pressconference/index.html> on February 2nd 2007.

¹⁰² Burma's Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC) is the lead organisation in the SPDC's drug enforcement operations

¹⁰³ “Questions and answers at the Press Conference 4/2006,” SPDC press conference, April 27th 2006. Accessed at <http://www.myanmar.com/pressconference/index.html> on February 2nd 2007.

¹⁰⁴ *Chronic Emergency: Health and Human Rights in Eastern Burma*. Backpack Health Worker Team, 2006. Page 17. Only Sierra Leone had a poorer performance.

¹⁰⁵ *Human Development Report 2006 - Beyond Scarcity: Power, poverty and the global water crisis*, United Nations Development Programme, 2006.

Rural health conditions

"We dare not go back to our village. All of our livestock were lost. We ran away to the forest during the rainy season. We are facing food shortages and problems with sickness."

– Saw K--- (male, 65), H--- village, Papun District (July 2006)

"We had to run in the rainy season into the forest. Many people have fallen sick. There are medics but those medics have no medicine. When women deliver their new babies people have to carry them in hammocks and cover them with plastic sheets in the rain."

– Saw M--- (male, 57), B--- village, Papun District (July 2006)

In the face of regular military abuse villagers have found their health situation deteriorating as elementary preventative measures like clean water and mosquito nets and basic medicines to treat illnesses such as malaria, dysentery or diarrhoea become unobtainable. In areas it is trying to bring under control such as northern Karen State, the SPDC effectively blocks access to these measures through direct military attacks on villages and blockades on roads and pathways from the plains and the hills where people carrying food or medicines face harassment or arrest. In areas already under SPDC control, access is prevented by the poverty created by grinding military exploitation of civilians. Furthermore, military extortion and restrictions on movement and trade foster food shortages and malnutrition. Access to medical treatment is either directly blocked through movement restrictions, or indirectly by exorbitant prices demanded at SPDC hospitals and clinics. Villagers thus suffer as communicable diseases spread, treatable diseases go unaddressed and injuries take people away from their fields for longer than necessary.

Thus, as the SPDC military works to expand and consolidate its control of Karen State, preventable illnesses like malaria, diarrhoea and tuberculosis become increasingly rampant. Malaria has been identified as the *"single most commonly diagnosed reason for death"* with 12.4% of displaced villagers in eastern Karen State *at any given time* infected with its most dangerous Plasmodium Falciparum variant.¹⁰⁶

"We have no dispensary in the village and if we get seriously sick, we go to other places to get treatment. The common diseases in the village are malaria, diarrhoea, dysentery, and hepatitis."

– Saw L--- (male, 40), M--- village, Papun District (March 2006)

"The common diseases in our area are such as malaria, diarrhoea and some people have gotten tuberculosis."

– Saw J--- (male, 26), W--- village, Papun District (March 2006)

¹⁰⁶ *Chronic Emergency: Health and Human Rights in Eastern Burma*, Back Pack Health Worker Team, 2006. pp.65

While villagers struggle to address their basic health needs, SPDC officials force them to attend health education lectures for which they must supply their own food and transport costs while taking time away from their own subsistence occupations. Rather than attempting to understand the actual medical concerns of local communities and supporting villagers' own health strategies, the military uses these venues to deliver medical sermons and implement inappropriate treatment measures. For example, although in some areas of southern Karen State during 2005-2006 the SPDC utilised the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA) to conduct UNICEF-funded mass polio inoculations, they nevertheless failed to address any of the health needs which local villagers report as being most critical.

"Our villagers have to pay 50 kyat for one paracetamol tablet and have to buy other medicine as well because the health worker also has to pay for the medicine. The SPDC has not provided any medicine for us. They have only provided polio vaccines for the children. The common disease occurring in our village is malaria."

– U M--- (male, 50), village head, P--- village, Dooplaya District (Nov 2005)

"Some health workers came to inject polio vaccines for free but I don't think that we have any polio disease."

– Pee K--- (female, 85), N--- village, Dooplaya District (Jan 2006)

Although the SPDC has been implementing the polio inoculation drive with funding from UNICEF,¹⁰⁷ villagers in some areas have been led to believe that receiving the vaccination, as well as accessing certain health trainings, is conditional upon signing up to join the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation, a parastatal organisation controlled by the SPDC, and paying the requisite application fee which ranges from 300-500 kyat.¹⁰⁸

"The Woman's Affairs Association chairperson will come to give a talk about health but I don't yet understand [about this] because she hasn't done so before. After she has come I will understand it. She gave us 50 [Myanmar Women's Affairs application] forms for each village. I think that after we have joined, the health group will come to inject polio vaccines free for our children. After we have filled in all of the forms she will come to give us a training but I don't know exactly when."

– Daw T--- (female, 53) K--- village, Dooplaya District (Jan 2006)

While polio eradication is surely an important health objective neither UNICEF nor the SPDC have sought to provide the basic medical assistance that villagers say they most greatly need. As one village head told KHRG, *"If it is possible I would like to get something. I would like to get a mosquito net... and if possible we need blankets as well for the cold season has now begun."* The

¹⁰⁷ "Helping children stay healthy and well-nourished," UNICEF: Myanmar, 2007. Accessed at www.unicef.org/myanmar/health_nutrition_1356.html on March 16th 2007.

¹⁰⁸ For more information on the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation, see 'Civil organisation' section below.

SPDC willingness to permit polio inoculations may stem from the fact that such vaccinations require that civilians register in SPDC-controlled areas and further that no medicines can leave SPDC-controlled areas. Alternatively, providing medicines and which villagers could take with them would provide for a measure of civilian mobility which the regime is not willing to accept.

Forced construction of clinics

"For the development of the health sector the 150 bed hospital was promoted to the 200-bed hospital after 1988. Again, two hospitals with 50 beds and eight L6 beds each have been opened. Besides, 8 rural health care centres and 41 rural health care branches have been opened in Kayin [Karen] State... The number of health staff has also increased. Seventy one doctors, 176 nurses and 81 health staff have been employed and they are taking care of the local people's health."

- SPDC press statement (June 2006)¹⁰⁹

"There is a clinic in our village, but there is no nurse or medicine in it. The SPDC forced the villagers to construct it for them very quickly and now there is nothing in it."

- Saw W--- (male, 46), T--- village, Thaton District (Feb 2006)

The SPDC has used the construction of state clinics in rural areas as an alternative to actually delivering effective health care services in Karen areas. While junta spokespersons list figures of new hospitals, clinics, doctors and nurses based in rural areas, soldiers have actually forced local villagers to construct these buildings with no compensation and furthermore required that they provide their own tools and construction supplies as well as food for the duration of the labour. Upon completion, SPDC publicity campaigns paint such projects as wholly state funded.

"We also have one clinic in our village. This clinic was constructed by the villagers. The villagers paid all the money to the carpenters and provided the wood, bamboo and leaves. But later the [SPDC] Army's Rakhine troops said that they had constructed this clinic."

- Naw B--- (female, 45), village secretary, Thaton District (Feb 2006)

Following the completion of construction work and the subsequent opening ceremonies, SPDC authorities leave these clinics empty. Like the schools, there is sometimes a health worker paid by the state (usually only for the first few months), but there are no medicines or supplies. Should villagers actually wish to access any kind of health care at these locations, they would have to purchase the supplies themselves. Given the grinding poverty brought on by military abuse and restrictions, such possibilities are limited. Apparently never

¹⁰⁹ "Kayin, Bamar, Rakhine, Mon, Shan, PaO, and other races striving for emergence of peaceful, developed and modern State under the guidance of the State Peace and Development Council in Kayin State", SPDC Press Conference, June 11th 2006. Accessed at http://www.myanmar.com/press_conference/2006/11-6f.html on March 2nd 2007.

having looked inside one of these empty clinics, the World Health Organisation has defended the regime's poor health care performance by claiming that, *"While the government has set up a fairly widespread system of health care providers, utilization tends to be relatively low."*¹¹⁰ Confronted with the SPDC's hollow health care scheme some local communities have initiated the construction and stocking of village health clinics on their own, although often relying on the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW) of the KNU for material support. In Pa'an District, the SPDC required villagers who built KDHW-supported clinics in 2006 to register these facilities under the SPDC so they could be added to the list of facilities generously provided by the state. Such clinics, however, exist at the whim of the local military commander, and many have been closed down on the grounds that the medicine (none of which is provided by the state) could end up in the hands of 'rebels'.

Forced medical training

Alongside the forced construction of health clinics, the SPDC forces villagers to attend various medical training sessions and education seminars. The most common of these programmes focus on midwifery training. Despite forcing civilians to attend such trainings SPDC officials provide no support, leaving participants to cover all costs themselves while taking time out of their regular subsistence work. Upon completion of the trainings, the SPDC provides no funds or other support for the midwives beyond a certificate of completion. Villagers therefore benefit little as most cannot afford the high cost of medicine.

"In every village, the SPDC [health director] ordered one person from each village to attend midwife training. Every time when the villagers have attended the training they have had to bring 50,000 kyat. People who are seriously sick go to the hospital in the town. They have doctors and nurses there. After a doctor checks them, he writes down the name of the medicine and tells them to buy it at the chemist's shop. If the villagers want to recover, they must bring a lot of money. If you don't have money, they don't try to do their best for you. At SPDC hospitals the SPDC has constructed chemist shops. If people go to the hospital, they don't allow the people to buy medicine from another shop. So the people who go to their hospital must only buy the medicine in their [SPDC] shop. But for the villagers who don't have money, it isn't easy for them to go to the hospital in the town."

– Saw T--- (male), T--- village, Thaton District (2006)

Restrictions on medicine and health care

While the SPDC cites a flawless track record of health promotion the military continues to undermine health conditions in Karen State. This exacerbation of the humanitarian crisis in Karen areas goes beyond the under-funding of

¹¹⁰ WHO Country Cooperation Strategy [CCS], Myanmar, World Health Organisation, June 28th 2000. Accessed at www.who.int/countries/en/cooperation_strategy_mmr_en.pdf on February 28th 2007.

medical care to include direct obstruction of independent healthcare initiatives. Soldiers regularly confiscate and destroy medicine and burn down clinics built and stocked by KDHW or cross-border relief organisations. The assertion is that medicine in civilian possession may possibly reach the KNU. SPDC and DKBA soldiers therefore accuse villagers found with medical supplies of having KNU affiliations and subsequently threaten, torture and, in some cases, kill them. The Back Pack Health Worker Team, an independent medical aid group providing assistance from Thailand, has also reported that clinics it has set up have been razed by SPDC soldiers. Health workers operating outside of SPDC structures have reported that they dare not carry any log books or medical data with them when travelling through SPDC-controlled areas as they fear military retaliation should these items be discovered. The targeting of medicine and medical facilities illustrates the SPDC perception that obstruction to healthcare is a legitimate instrument in the effort to expand military control over the civilian population.

They [SPDC soldiers] constructed their army camp, Maw Kaw Der army camp, next to the path so the villagers don't dare to go to Kler La. We heard that last month SPDC soldiers captured villagers from Gkaw Haw Der who had gone to Kler La to buy food. But now in Kler La there is nothing. The SPDC has blocked rice, salt and fish paste and there is only bread. They don't allow the villagers to sell rice, salt and fish paste. They also block medicine. The cars can't travel except for the porters of the SPDC. Cars can also only travel to carry food for the SPDC."

– Saw T--- (male), T--- village, Toungoo District (May 2006)

"They sell medicine there [at Than Daung town, Toungoo District], but as you know the SPDC government never has the exact [kind] or all kinds of medicine. If we go to buy medicine, we have to first get permission from the SPDC soldiers who have settled in our village. If we don't ask for permission from them and if we go to buy it, when we come back they would kill us if they find any medicine with us. Even if they wouldn't kill, they would certainly torture us and take all of the medicine away from us."

– Saw E--- (male, 22), G--- village, Toungoo District (2006)

They took her medicine away, and her child died in vain...

"They [DKBA soldiers] also looted the woman Naw H---'s medicine, amoxicillin, which she bought on her own. The soldier looted it from her and he said that she wasn't a medic and so she shouldn't keep a whole container of amoxicillin. She told him that she had bought it for her children and for the use of her own family, but he didn't give it back to her and he hit her. Naw H--- is about 31 years old. He hit her twice with a big rattan and she cried. Naw H--- was hit on June 7th, at two o'clock. They also took things from Tharamu P---'s shop. They took the medicine that the health workers [from the cross-border mobile medical team] had provided for the pregnant women and the villagers. They took all of the medicine that they saw in the shop...

The things that they took were things for the villagers, not things for the army. It was not for the purpose of opposing them. We tried to explain it to them in many ways, but they didn't accept this nor listen to us and they went back... We don't have any dispensary in our village. We have one midwife in our village and the health workers gave her a little medicine for the villagers, but they [DKBA soldiers] came and took it all. The common diseases that the villagers suffer are diarrhoea, dysentery, cold, coughing, malaria, fever, stomach ache, rheumatism and dizziness. Most of the villagers suffer from stomach aches and chronic fever.

When DKBA commander Moe Kyo [second in command of DKBA Brigade #333] entered the village, one of the children, Naw H---'s child, was sick with a chronic fever. The child had a high temperature and he still had a high temperature every night so his mother bought medicine for him. But his mother was beaten by the DKBA soldiers for having bought the medicine for her child and they took her medicine away. Later, this child died in vain. This child was three years old."

– Naw K--- (female, 50), K--- village, Thaton District (July 2006)

"We don't have any clinic in the village. Even if we are severely ill, we are not allowed to go to the hospital because they [SPDC soldiers] are afraid that we [hill villagers] are KNU spies."

– Saw G--- (male, 30), S--- village, Toungoo District (April 2006)

Further obstruction of access to medical treatment in Karen areas includes restrictions on international health and relief organisations operating through Rangoon from accessing most Karen areas. In August 2005, the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria pulled out of Burma, citing unworkable SPDC-imposed restrictions as the central factor behind the move. In March 2006, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) (France) pulled out of Burma after more than four years of work in limited areas of Karen and Mon States. Explaining

the motives behind the withdrawal, Hervé Isambert, head of MSF (France)'s Burma programme cited increased restrictions imposed by the SPDC and the regime's efforts to subjugate humanitarian organisations to their political agenda.

*"the Burmese authorities do not want foreign independent organisations close to the populations they want to control. They do not want any embarrassing witnesses while they organise the forced displacement of populations, burning of villages and forced recruitment, etc... Today, we have to acknowledge that it was incredulous to think that room existed for a humanitarian organisation to work there... For humanitarian organisations, the question is to know at what moment their role is reduced to that of technical subcontractor to the Burmese authorities, subordinate to their political agenda and no longer guided by the objectives which they set themselves."*¹¹¹

In November 2006, the SPDC ordered all five field offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) closed, including one formerly operating in Pa'an Town of Karen State, in order to get them out of areas where its military is abusing and exploiting the civilian population. Although the ICRC was then able to negotiate to prevent closure of most of these offices, the SPDC nevertheless increasingly restricted the organisation's activities. As a consequence of the impossibility of fulfilling its mandate under SPDC restrictions, the ICRC decided in March 2007 to close two of its field offices in eastern Burma. Explaining the decision, director of operations Pierre Krähenbühl said, *"The ICRC's humanitarian work in Myanmar has now reached near-paralysis."*¹¹² The SPDC has indicated that it will take a similarly restrictive approach towards the upcoming delivery of aid via the Three Diseases Fund for AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria (the 3D Fund), after having developed regime-controlled 'coordination committees' to ensure that all activities of this programme as well remain subordinate to its political agenda.¹¹³

By permitting or restricting access to a given area, the SPDC has effectively used international humanitarian organisations for political ends. The UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro has criticised the legitimacy of this tactic stating, *"Humanitarian assistance should not be made hostage of politics."*¹¹⁴ Rather than being provided on a basis of need, the SPDC ensures that humanitarian assistance remains within politically

¹¹¹ "Birmanie: Empêchée de travailler, la section française de MSF quitte le pays," March 30th 2006. Accessed at www.msf.fr/site/actu.nsf/actus/birmanie290306 on January 18th 2007.

¹¹² "Myanmar: No progress in talks, ICRC closes offices," ICRC, March 17th 2007. Accessed at www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/myanmar-news-150307!OpenDocument on March 17th 2007.

¹¹³ "Government to keep tight rein on aid in Burma," The Irrawaddy, March 13th 2007. Accessed at www.irrawaddy.org/aviewer.asp?a=6800&z=163 on March 17th 2007.

¹¹⁴ "Irrawaddy: UN rights expert calls for access to threatened Karen," The Irrawaddy, February 2007. Accessed at <http://www.burmanet.org/news/2007/02/27/irrawaddy-un-rights-expert-calls-for-access-to-threatened-karen-shah-paung/> on March 2nd 2007.

safe parameters. Civilians attempting to evade military abuse cannot therefore access the medical treatment provided by international agencies without forsaking their freedom and relocating to live under military rule. Those humanitarian organisations choosing to operate in Burma under an ostensibly neutral framework thus find themselves incorporated into the system of military control. This role is inescapable unless such organisations are willing to implement their programmes based on measures of humanitarian need as opposed to political convenience.

While international humanitarian agencies should push for an end to SPDC restrictions on operating in these areas on principle, this does not mean that they should necessarily implement their programme without addressing necessary safeguards. KHRG's concerns regarding the potential effectiveness and harm of these agencies working under SPDC control remain. In principle these agencies must be free to access civilians in Karen areas. However, these agencies should not implement their programmes where SPDC restrictions and control on their operations undermine the effectiveness of aid to the point where it becomes harmful and undermines the rights of local peoples, or where their presence will serve to establish strong state control over people currently doing what they can to evade such control. The right to humanitarian assistance requires not only that international agencies have geographical access to vulnerable groups, but more importantly that civilians can access health care assistance on their own terms, as for example, through the establishment of independent community-based health care initiatives, free from the mechanisms of military control.

A useful litmus test indicating whether aid is beneficial or detrimental is to assess whether it expands or reduces the choices available to local people. For example, food aid to SPDC-controlled forced relocation sites, if delivered with state approval and cooperation, allows the SPDC to intern villagers in these sites indefinitely while giving the regime an additional interest in retaining the site for the sake of the aid that can be skimmed off by the Army; whereas in the absence of such aid, officials have little choice but to allow villagers outside the camp to forage, and families use this opportunity to escape, thereby bringing an end to the internment. In this case, then, the aid has reduced the choices available to the villagers, whereas food aid sneaked into the relocation site without SPDC knowledge (and such programmes have been implemented successfully in several sites by cross-border aid agencies) helps villagers to survive while still pleading the need for relaxed restrictions and thus keeping open their chance for escape – thus expanding the choices available to them. Similarly, health programmes implemented via parastatal organisations like the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA; see below) force villagers to live under tight state control, obey demands and restrictions, and even join these organisations in order to receive benefits, thereby reducing their life choices; whereas health programmes delivered covertly outside state control require no such concessions on the part of the intended beneficiaries.

Alternative health care strategies

As levels of health and nutrition in military-controlled areas remain dangerously low and access to adequate health care becomes increasingly obstructed, villagers have sought alternative, non-SPDC channels through which to address their medical needs. Given the exorbitant cost of medical supplies at SPDC clinics, hospitals and pharmacies, villagers frequently employ traditional medicines that can be concocted from locally-available ingredients.

"In our village, we don't have any dispensary. For medicine, we search for and buy it for ourselves at other villages. If someone has some in the village they help each other, and the people that know about herbal medicine help other people as well."

– U K--- (male, 50), H--- village, Thaton District (July 2006)

These natural remedies, however, are frequently insufficient. Many villagers therefore depend on medicine and medical treatment provided by the Karen Department of Health and Welfare and other groups providing supplies across the border from Thailand such as the Back Pack Health Worker Team and the Free Burma Rangers which all operate mobile units providing medical relief in Karen areas. As the SPDC views these groups as enemies, villagers must hide whatever supplies they obtain. Patients as well are often moved to houses when villagers learn that troops are approaching in order to minimise the attention that these soldiers might focus on local clinics. The expansion of SPDC control over Karen areas has made villagers' access to mobile medical units – one of the main health care strategies they use in difficult circumstances – much more difficult. Clinics at previously accessible sites in Karen State have had to relocate or close down altogether where the SPDC has established a more permanent presence. Increased SPDC control has thus led to a decrease in health care access for civilians.

"We don't have a hospital in our village. But there is one medicine dispensary. When we get sick we go to him [the vendor] at the dispensary and buy a bottle of saline solution and ask him to inject it for us. The KNU [probably KDHW] gave him some medicine so that he could give it to us for free. The Back Pack [Health Worker Teams] and other KNU [KDHW] health workers come into our village once a month."

– Ma A--- (female, 44), K--- village, Doooplaya District (Jan 2006)

"My village has been relocated for five years already. We don't have a clinic or hospital in the village. When we get sick we buy medicine from the people who sell medicine and treat ourselves. But if it is untreatable, we would go to the district hospital. This hospital was constructed by the KNU [again probably KDHW]."

– Saw P--- (male, 23), T--- village, Toungoo District (March 2006)



Medics from a Karen relief organisation visit villagers in Lu Thaw township to whom they can provide a limited amount of medicine and treatment. [Photo: KHRG]

Beyond primary treatment these groups also provide training for traditional birth attendants (TBAs) and medics. As those trained are local villagers, their increased knowledge and abilities strengthen community control over health and welfare. Although the SPDC has also conducted trainings for TBAs and medics, these trainings are forced and villagers must cover all costs on top of the initial fees demanded.

While cross-border health programmes and local independent Karen medical organisations are able to provide limited medical supplies to villagers, these must be kept hidden. Should such possessions be discovered by the SPDC or DKBA, soldiers will confiscate and destroy them, threatening, torturing and even killing those civilians in whose possession they are found. The covert possession and sharing of medicine amongst villagers is therefore a further method of asserting their right to health in resistance to the military's attempts at control and repression.

"Many people have become sick while we've been displaced and we have helped each other as we can, because we do not have enough medicines for us [all]."

– Naw P--- (female), K--- village, Toungoo District (Feb 2006)

Health and military control

Like education, the SPDC sees health care as a potential vehicle for military control of civilians, but any health care which occurs outside its control or benefits people outside its control as a threat. By systematically destroying

health care strategies in areas beyond military control, restricting civilian access to medicine and medical facilities, and obstructing international humanitarian organisations from working in all areas of Karen State, the SPDC has politicised health care in its attempt to bring all civilians under military control. While denying its manipulation of health care access in Karen areas, the SPDC has continued to provide skewed data to international organisations and UN agencies in support of the argument that all aid intended for the development of the health care system be directed through State structures. However, in Karen and other areas civilians have been actively resisting the imposition of military control while at the same time trying to take whatever benefits may be available to them from whatever source. By expressing critical views, hiding personal medical supplies and seeking out cross-border medical providers, among other strategies, Karen villagers are trying to claim their right to health and adequate health care.

Civil organisations

“Last year, 2004, and this year, 2005, the SPDC demanded from us a household population register including all fields and plantations. They said that if we didn’t give this register then when they come and take our fields, our land and our livestock we cannot object.”

- Ko A (male, 36), T--- village, Dooplaya District (Dec 2005)

The consolidation of military control over much of southern Karen State, especially since the intensive campaigns of 1997, has opened space for the SPDC to systematise structures of authority and control over the civilian population. In most of Thaton, Dooplaya and Pa’an Districts and to a lesser extent in the districts further north, the SPDC has been registering the entire civilian population and demanding that villages supply quotas of individuals for involvement in military-controlled associations. All villages in SPDC areas must compile lists of inhabitants, their family relations and land possessions. Local army officers have told villagers this registration will allow them to get identification cards with which they will then be permitted to travel outside their home village. This forced registration however, also allows these same officials to use this document to assess how much and how frequently food, funds and labour can be extorted from each village. In addition, each household must post on the wall outside of their home a list of all those living inside, including name, sex and age. If soldiers find that a family member is consistently absent or if they find an unregistered visitor, these people (and the family by association) are accused of involvement with the armed opposition and can be detained, interrogated and tortured.

“Last rainy season the SPDC forced us to prepare a register of households. We had to give two copies of it to the Operations Command and two copies to Infantry Battalion #83. It was a lot of work so we had to ask the teachers to help us, because most of the villagers can’t read or write Burmese [and each copy would have to be written out

by hand]. The teachers had to ask their students to help, so it also disrupted the students' education. They [the Army] said if we gave them the register it would be easy for us to get ID cards. Around our village it is very hard for people to get ID cards, but the villagers just complied anyway out of fear, because they also threatened that if any household didn't hand in its registration and later got into trouble, the village head will not be allowed to vouch for them [to verify they are her villagers so they will be released from detention]. They demanded 600 kyat from each household to register, and they said if villagers wanted to laminate their household register list then they have to pay 200 kyat for the plastic. So the total each household had to pay to be on the register list was 800 kyat."

– Naw L--- (female, 34), T--- village, Doooplaya District (Jan 2006)

"Last year we collected household registers in our village and we submitted them to the former Village Peace and Development Council chairperson Win Naing along with 500 kyat for each household. We must do household registration because if we have no register the SPDC will arrest us when we go to buy something at Kawkareik town."

– Naw B--- (female, 44), Y--- village, Doooplaya District (July 2006)

Village and household registration furthermore supports the expansion of official SPDC associations. Officers order village heads to provide a stated number of their villagers to enlist and undergo training within these military associations. The SPDC has forced civilians in Karen State to join nationwide parastatal organisations like the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA), the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation (MWAFF), the Auxiliary Fire Fighters, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) and the local village militia, or *Pyi Thu Sit* ('People's Army').

Development meetings and training sessions

In order to extend its control networks at the local level, the SPDC has been establishing Village Peace and Development Councils (VPDCs) throughout military-controlled areas of Karen State through which the regime delivers orders for village registration, demands to join parastatal organisations and quotas for forced labour and other requirements. This has involved appointing VPDC chairpersons for each village, ordering these individuals to attend regular monthly meetings at regional Township Peace and Development Committee (TPDC) offices as well as other 'training sessions' and then requiring them to implement SPDC demands at the village level all under the rubric of development. These meetings, which cost those attending between 1,000 - 2,000 kyat per month, consist of SPDC authorities issuing orders, scolding village chairpersons for prior non-compliance and threatening them against future disobedience. Village chairpersons are put in the difficult position where they are expected to enforce SPDC demands on their own communities which they know cannot afford to comply. These demands cover many of the programmes enumerated in the sections above, such as the forced cultivation of castor beans and summer season paddy crops, the forced purchases of

agricultural supplies and equipment, the forced construction of schools, libraries and clinics and forced labour on roadways, SPDC plantations and military camps. While the SPDC has carried out this regimentation of civilian life via the VPDC under the mantle of 'development', for the civilian population this has meant solely a systematisation of military demands on the civilian population.

"Starting on November 5th 2005 the management and security training was opened at Zi Na Thu Ka monastery in Kawkareik town. Three people in my village ward attended that training for three days. Each person had to pay 5,000 kyat for food fees during the three days. We had to attend this training without fail."

– U T--- (male, 37), K--- village, Dooplaya District (June 2006)

On top of the regular monthly meetings regional authorities in some areas have organised a series of 'management trainings' to which village chairpersons, secretaries and second secretaries have had to attend. Not only were these individuals forced to take time away from their own livelihoods in order to attend, they moreover had to pay a 50,000 kyat fee in order to attend these meetings and bring along all necessary supplies, including notebooks, rulers, pencils, pens, mosquito nets, blankets, bedsheets and cups. In order to afford the fees demanded, many village chairpersons had to collect the money from the members of their community. Along with various agricultural initiatives and other forced labour programmes which village chairpersons were ordered to implement, the SPDC authorities conducting the training also instructed them to report any 'enemies' entering their village to local police or army personnel. Such trainings have extended to cover issues of agriculture, health, general village organisation and the formation of local village-level paramilitary groups such as the *Pyi Thu Sit* militia and auxiliary Fire Brigades.

We had to attend the training without fail...

"The name of our training was 'Management and Security'. We had to attend that training without fail. In August 2005, TPDC Organising Director Kyaw Mya Hlaing sent a letter ordering us to meet with him at the Ler Mu office, and that the village chairpersons and secretaries must attend the Security and Management training at Moulmein. On October 3rd the VPDC chairpersons went to attend the training, and on October 10th the village secretaries like me went. It was in Moulmein at the Tavoy College, Shwe Myein hall. We had to bring everything with us, like notebooks, ruler, pencils, pens, mosquito net, blanket, bedsheet, and cup, and when we arrived everyone had to give 11,000 kyat for admission fees. We ate three times a day at 7 am, noon and 5 pm. We had to attend the training without fail. In our training for 1st secretaries there were 249 of us there for five days. There were over 10 trainers. They talked about managing the village and transportation between villages, they explained how village secretaries have many duties but no salary, and that we must evaluate the school and teachers. On security they told us that our villages must be kept safe by keeping gangsters out, and that if any enemies [KNU or

other SPDC opposition] enter the village we must inform the nearest Army or police unit. On economics, they told us to plant paddy, several kinds of bean, corn, sugarcane, there must have been over ten crops in all but I can't remember them all. On health, they said our VPDC chairpersons must work together to fill the needs of our villages, for example by building dispensaries.

I had to collect 50,000 kyat from the villagers for training expenses. The K--- [village] chairman said to me, 'The only use of this training is to make our money disappear.' He meant there is no benefit from this. In the evenings after the training sessions we discussed the training and agreed that it was no use to us and our money was lost for nothing. The third session was for the village 2nd secretaries but the 2nd secretary of Beh Lah Mu village didn't attend, so on October 19th the Light Infantry Battalion #588 Battalion Commander Myint Zaw sent his Warrant Officer Than Win with a group of soldiers. They came at night to look for village 2nd secretary Maung O--- at his rubber plantation hut, but he wasn't there. The soldiers only found his son-in-law S--- so they beat him with their rifle butts two or three times. That night Maung O--- was at W--- village, so the others called him back urgently. When he arrived they arrested him and took him to their Battalion camp, and the village chairman went along. The chairman explained that Maung O--- couldn't attend the training because he had no money and the villagers weren't able to pay for his expenses. After that they released him."

– U P--- (male, 51), K--- village, Dooplaya District (Dec 2005)

Local SPDC army officers also order village heads to attend informal meetings on an *ad hoc* basis as a means to disseminate particular demands for forced labour or extortion. As these are outside of the official monthly meetings that village heads must attend, individual commanders have used such fora to issue their own entrepreneurial exploitation programmes including forced agricultural schemes and labour on officer's plantations and forced purchases of agricultural supplies. While these demands frequently profit solely the issuing officers and their cronies, these individuals nonetheless apply the SPDC's development rhetoric in an attempt to justify their claims on the villagers and thereby tie in their individual extortion rackets to the wider system of SPDC 'development'.

"On 1st November 2006, the SPDC summoned me to attend the meeting at their IB # 284 army camp. They talked to us and forced us to come and take rubber and plant it in the lands next to the IB #284 army camp. The lands were quite big, but I can't tell how big they are. The lands were the villagers'. They confiscated the villagers' land when they constructed their army camp 10 years ago. They constructed their army camp on the land and, with the remaining land, they either sold it or forced the villagers to plant rubber on it. Some of the lands that they confiscated used to be plantations of the villagers and others were rice fields. The owners of the lands felt bad and unsatisfied. The owners

went to them [the SPDC] to discuss their lands, but they didn't give it back to the owners. They said that the government had already confiscated it, so they couldn't give it back."

– Saw H--- (male, 30), D--- village, Dooplaya District (Nov 2006)

Whether at the monthly meetings, training sessions or *ad hoc* summons to meet with local military commanders, village chairpersons forced to attend are given neither opportunity for input nor option to decline. These village heads nevertheless frequently attempt to negotiate reductions in demands on the grounds that their communities cannot possibly afford to comply. In response, SPDC officers and civilian officials issuing the decrees typically threaten them or claim that, as the orders came from their superiors, they must enforce them. Village heads therefore complain among themselves regarding the excessive burden of having to attend such meetings and the futility of the various 'development' schemes imposed on them. The SPDC in contrast, presents such meetings as a legitimate means of implementing its 'development' agenda. The fact that villagers see no benefit in either the meetings or the programmes disseminated therein, are provided no opportunity for input and furthermore see the demands placed on them as excessive and detrimental to their livelihoods undermines any claims that the SPDC-controlled VPDC framework, the obligatory meetings and the demands issued therein are in any way legitimate.

Women's organisations

"Women that join their groups have to pay admission fees. They ordered the village head to select women to join Myanmar Women's Affairs [Federation]. We already collected money from the villagers and sent it to them. Every person who joined had to pay 310 kyat. No villagers were interested in joining, so we had to force them to join. They gave 50 application forms to my village. Even though the villagers don't want to do the things they are forced or ordered to, they have to do it because we are under SPDC control. The SPDC doesn't sympathise with the difficulties of the villagers. For Maternity and Child Welfare [MMCWA], they gave 100 forms to our village, but we haven't done anything yet. I know that the villagers don't understand anything about these organisations, but when the SPDC demands money from them they are used to paying without knowing or understanding why."

– Naw L— (female, 34), village head, T— village, Dooplaya District (Jan 2006)

Since their establishment as military-controlled organisations, the MMCWA and the MWAFF have functioned within the structures of SPDC authority. Former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt, who established the MWAFF in 2003, asserted that the role of the organisation was to *"take charge of the women sector comprehensively"*¹¹⁵ and current MWAFF General Secretary Khin Mar Tun has

¹¹⁵ "Formation of MWAFF," *News and Views from Myanmar*, Myanmar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, December 29th 2003. Accessed at http://www.mofa.gov.mm/news/dec29_mon6.html on January 18th 2007.

declared *“the MAAF plays an important role not only in development of women but also in that of the State.”*¹¹⁶ The junta created the MMCWA in 1990 through the issuance of law No. 21/90 and claimed that by 2006 the total number of members had ballooned to 5.4 million people, over 10% of the total population of Burma.¹¹⁷

Both agencies serve to implement State directives, echo the SPDC party line in various public fora; and expand military structures further into civilian life. The wives of military personnel fill all positions of authority in both organisations. At the local level this means that the village MMCWA chair is automatically the wife of the SPDC-appointed village headman, while the township-level MMCWA chair is the wife of the Township Peace and Development Council chairman. Until 2004 the MMCWA was headed up by Daw Khin Win Shwe, wife of Intelligence Chief and SPDC Secretary-1 Khin Nyunt. The current head of the MMCWA is Kyu Kyu Shwe, wife of Colonel Pe Thein who is a senior officer in the Office of the Prime Minister and formerly commanded the SPDC's psychological warfare unit.

“The TPDC [Township Peace and Development Council] and VPDC [Village Peace and Development Council] forced the villagers to organise themselves as the Maternal and Child Welfare [MMCWA] and Myanmar Women’s Affairs [Federation]. They forced the women in the villages to organise this. If her husband is village head, she must become the [MMCWA or MAAF] village head, and if her husband is village secretary then she must become the secretary. They don’t care if they’re literate or illiterate, even illiterate women were chosen to be the leaders and secretaries. Now we have 27 women in Myanmar Women’s Affairs and 7 women in MMCWA. They didn’t get any training about these organisations and they don’t need to do anything, but each woman had to pay 500 kyat to join these organisations.”

- A— (M, 43), village head, T— village, Doooplaya District (Jan 2006)

Advocating for international support for the MMCWA, the World Health Organisation has regurgitated SPDC slogans claiming that *“Myanmar has a rich tradition of voluntary spirit... MMCWA (Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association) provides one of the best illustrations of such voluntary spirit.”*¹¹⁸ However, in spite of such claims that the MAAF and MMCWA are all voluntary organisations and that, as the MMCWA states, only *“those who appreciate the*

¹¹⁶ “Information Sheet,” *Myanmar Information Committee*, July 23rd 2006, accessed at <http://www.myanmar-information.net/infosheet/2006/060723.htm> on January 18th 2007.

¹¹⁷ “Discussions from the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association Concerning the False News Reports from Internal and External Dissident Groups,” Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association, June 2006. Accessed at <http://mission.itu.ch/MISSIONS/Myanmar/mofa1/mmcwa.htm> on January 28th 2007.

¹¹⁸ WHO Country Cooperation Strategy [CCS], Myanmar, World Health Organisation, June 28th 2000. Accessed at www.who.int/countries/en/cooperation_strategy_mmr_en.pdf on February 28th 2007.

Association's belief, aim and mission to serve the people become members"¹¹⁹, the SPDC has been forcing women throughout SPDC-controlled areas of Karen State to join. Local army officers have sent applications forms to village heads who must meet a quota of applicants from amongst the women in their village. The respective women must pay for each of these forms; 250-350 kyat in the case of the MMCWA and 300-500 kyat in the case of the MWAFA. Although most of the villagers have no idea what these organisations actually do, they are ordered to pay the fees and return the forms 'without fail'.

"We have to attend SPDC meetings once a month at the Operations Command in Seik Gyi. This meeting has no benefit, instead it only gives trouble and worries to the villagers. In the meetings they order the villagers to do this and that. They ordered the village heads to select women to join Myanmar Women's Affairs [Federation], and then those women had to pay admission fees. They ordered the villagers to do plantations, and the villagers have to give them money too. They ordered the villagers to build libraries, join Myanmar Women's Affairs and [Myanmar] Maternity and Child Welfare [Association], and to tend plantations for them. Even though the villagers don't want to do anything that they demand or order, they have to do it because they are under SPDC control. The SPDC doesn't understand the difficulties of the villagers. They only understand how to find money and food for their own stomachs. We haven't yet done anything regarding the Maternal and Child Welfare [Association]. They gave our village 100 application forms. I know that the villagers don't understand what the organisation does but when the SPDC demands money from them, they pay even without understanding anything."

– Naw L--- (female, 34), T--- village, Doooplaya District (Jan 2006)

"My village was ordered by the former Village Peace and Development Council chairperson Win Naing five months ago [January 2006] to provide two persons to participate in the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation and Maternal and Child Welfare Association but my villagers don't want to do this and we have hired two people from Noh Kaw Dtoh [village] to join for us. Each household must pay 1,000 kyat for the people who we hire every month. If those organisations don't collapse we'll have to pay all the time. Our villagers dare not complain about this issue because we're afraid of the SPDC officials. We have to send money to Noh Kaw Dtoh to the Village Peace and Development Council chairperson Maung Nyunt. We dare not ask how he is using the money and so we don't know how he is using the money. This Myanmar Women's Affairs [Federation] and Maternal and Child Welfare Association are a disadvantage for us and are causing us heavy

¹¹⁹ "Discussions from the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association Concerning the False News Reports from Internal and External Dissident Groups," Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association, June 2006. Accessed at <http://mission.itu.ch/MISSIONS/Myanmar/mofal/mmcwa.htm> on January 28th 2007.

burdens because we have no money to pay but we must pay without fail."

– Naw B--- (44, female), Y--- village, Dooplaya District (July 2006)

The Union Solidarity and Development Association

Although both the MWAFF and MMCWA have grown extensively under the forced recruitment schemes, the main parastatal association through which the junta attempts to create an appearance of mass civilian support is the Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA). Formed in 1993 under the Association Law (SLORC Law 6/88) the USDA has since grown to a membership which the SPDC claims to be over 22 million people, as of 2005.¹²⁰ Official SPDC statements declare that *"USDA members [are] urged to actively participate in development tasks"*.¹²¹ The Association conducts mass recruitment drives across Burma, forcibly registering civilians under the banner of the 'Four-Point People's Desire' which demands of USDA members that they *"oppose those relying on external elements, acting as stooges or holding negative views; oppose those trying to jeopardize the stability of the State and progress of the nation; oppose foreign nations interfering in internal affairs of the State; and crush all internal and external destructive elements as the common enemy."*¹²² USDA membership has become a prerequisite to obtaining or keeping a civil service job (including teachers and medical staff), gaining admission to university, passing school exams, entering contests, performing at cultural festivals, and in some areas even receiving sporadic electricity or running water to one's house. In those areas of Karen State under consolidated military control, the SPDC has pushed USDA recruitment drives into villages, giving quotas for the membership numbers required.

"For the USDA [Union Solidarity Development Association], they also forced us to join them. They directed how many people from a village must join them. They told us that we could go to court if we have problems or if others did anything wrong to us. We were forced to join every organisation. For the USDA, we haven't organised our village to join it yet. They have ordered us to do this since May, but we haven't organised our villagers yet."

– Saw T--- (male, 43), P--- village, Dooplaya District (June 2006)

Despite SPDC assertions that the USDA plays a central role in national development, the regime has repeatedly used USDA members to commit political violence against its civilian opponents across Burma, leading Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at one point to compare them to Hitler's 'brown shirts'. To

¹²⁰ "Myanmar top leader urges USDA members to build democratic nation," *People's Daily Online*, November 9th 2006. Accessed at http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200611/09/eng20061109_319925.html on January 18th 2007.

¹²¹ "Information Sheet," *Myanmar Information Committee*, September 28th, 2005 accessed at <http://www.myanmar-information.net/infosheet/2005/050928.htm>

¹²² *The White Shirts: How the USDA will become the new face of Burma's dictatorship*, Network for Development and Democracy, May 2006, p.18.

fulfill this role, many USDA members have undergone basic military training in support of the group's objectives explicitly defined in the 'People's Desires'. Most USDA members, however, have joined only to avoid persecution or to keep their jobs, but this does not stop the SPDC proclaiming the organisation's huge membership as a supposed civilian support base.

Paramilitary groups

"The SPDC and VPDC forced the men to join the Pyi Thu Sit [People's Militia]. They gave them training but they didn't give them guns for the training. The villagers weren't given any choice whether to join or not. They had to join because they were ordered, but they didn't get any salary. After the training, the men didn't have to do anything. They were told that they have to secure their own village. Not only our village was ordered to join, but also the other villages."

– U L--- (male, 56), K--- village, Dooplaya District (Jan 2006)

SPDC-controlled paramilitary organisations active in Karen State include the *Pyi Thu Sit* (village militia), the Auxiliary Fire Brigades and the Myanmar Red Cross. Regional SPDC officials direct these groups to carry out sentry duty at the village, monitor for and report on the approach of 'enemies' such as KNLA soldiers, cross-border medical teams, or human rights researchers. These paramilitary groups must furthermore be available for military support service should the need arise. Despite their name, the SPDC considers the Auxiliary Fire Brigade and the Myanmar Red Cross as paramilitary forces.¹²³ Villages are ordered to support the members of the various militias with funds and food and occasionally to construct barracks to house group members.

"The SPDC set up the Pyi Thu Sit [People's Militias] in the villages that have many households. They forced the villagers to join the troops and four men in each village had to join. Every village must join the militia and any village that doesn't join must give the SPDC 80,000 kyat each year. But in practice, they [the villagers] hire people to join the militia [on their behalf]. The SPDC gives them training and gives them weapons and sets them up in the villages. They are given the duty to send SPDC messages and to serve as guides and go around with the SPDC when they arrive and patrol around the villages. The militia don't get any payment from SPDC so the villagers must give them food and build houses for them to live in. The commander of the militia is an NCO [non-commissioned officer] of the SPDC. On behalf of the militia, the SPDC asked the villagers for 80,000 kyat, bamboo, leaves and wood for their families and the villagers had to give this to them. The SPDC also asked for five baskets of rice from each house for the wives and children of the militia. The villagers must give this to them because they are afraid of the SPDC."

– KHRG field researcher, Thaton District (April 2006)

¹²³ Andrew Selth. 2002. *Burma's Armed Forces: Power Without Glory*, Norwalk: Eastbridge; p. 81.

“The SPDC personnel directed us to organise a militia but our villagers dare not do this because the villagers dare not carry guns. So, starting from May every household has had to pay 2,000 kyat every month. I think most of this is for the militia fees.”¹²⁴

– Naw B--- (female, 44), Y--- village, Doooplaya District (July 2006)

Social organisation and military control

By forcibly expanding such ‘civil’ associations the junta gains in two main ways. Firstly, by conscripting and registering civilians into such networks the military can more effectively control the populace by monitoring, obstructing and intimidating insipient dissent. In this way the SPDC franchises out repression to its paramilitary forces. Secondly, as a number of these organisations - and the MMCWA in particular - are heavily financed by international agencies, the SPDC may feel they can garner more funds by increasing the membership numbers and then arguing in favour of the organisations’ effectiveness and scope in implementing development programmes. The MMCWA reports that it operates with support from UNICEF, UNDP, UNAIDS, CARE and Médecins du Monde.¹²⁵ While a few of its activities at local level do yield some benefits for women and children, these must be weighed against the organisation’s coercive nature and its lack of consultation with or accountability to local people. It is questionable whether such benefits can be sustainable in the long run when implemented by organisations structured to have no respect for rights, and used in many areas to deny rights by acting as mechanisms of state control over civilians. In this way the SPDC can expand military control over the population while divesting itself of the cost of operating programmes and simultaneously legitimising its policies in the name of development. In judging the overall benefit or detriment of such organisations the only real voice that matters comes not from the international funding organisations, but from the villagers who are supposedly the beneficiaries; and in rural Karen areas, these voices consistently speak against the SPDC’s quasi-NGOs.

DKBA development schemes

The DKBA has, since its creation in 1994, operated under SPDC patronage as a proxy militia in the expansion of State control primarily over areas of southern and central Karen State, such as Thaton, Doooplaya and Pa’an Districts and southern Papun District. This has included both military attacks against villagers and KNLA forces to take control of new territory as well as the implementation of the SPDC’s development initiatives in areas already under

¹²⁴ Where villagers don’t want to engage in forced labour – in this case serving in the *Pyi Thu Sit* [People’s Militia] – they are required to pay fines or hire other villagers to take their place.

¹²⁵ “Discussions from the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association Concerning the False News Reports from Internal and External Dissident Groups,” Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association, June 2006. Accessed at <http://mission.itu.ch/MISSIONS/Myanmar/mofal/mmcwa.htm> on January 28th 2007.

consolidated control. The SPDC has been giving the DKBA funds to carry out operations under junta's political agenda. In Thaton District and parts of southern Papun District, for example, KHRG field researchers report that the SPDC paid DKBA Brigades #999, 777 and 333, which operate together with SPDC forces in the area, 200 million kyat in early 2006 to participate in joint operations.¹²⁶ The two groups have been ordering villagers to give complete information on KNU and KNLA operatives in each village tract. Villagers unable to provide any information have been beaten and tortured, and the combined units have also been looting villages and making heavy demands on the villagers' rice. In Thaton District, the SPDC informed the DKBA in early 2006 that, should they be effective in finally eradicating the KNU presence, they would have permission to take control, under SPDC authority, of the civilian population of the region.

Despite rampant DKBA abuses against the civilian Karen population, at a meeting with DKBA leaders in Hlaingbwe, Pa'an District, in August 2006, Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council Lieutenant General Thein Sein *"praised the implementation of development measures by the DKBA, including the building of monasteries and pagodas, extension of roads in Hpa-an and construction of the Myainggyingu-Methawaw dirt road."*¹²⁷ Under the pretext of development, the DKBA has implemented SPDC-style restrictions and abuse; subjugating the local Karen population and exploiting civilians for labour, food, money and other supplies. Often such extortion functions as part of local DKBA business projects when, for example, certain DKBA commanders demand large numbers of thatch or bamboo poles which they then resell for profit or force villagers to labour on rubber and other plantations.

Stamped: - Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)

Date... 13.2.2006

D--- village

Gentleman,

To inform to the gentleman so that [he] knows about it. For the coming [year] (2006) the DKBA families need thatch for their house roofs, [so] collect 50 shingles of thatch [from each household in the village] and the last date for sending [the thatch] to Papun is on 30.1.2006. This is to inform you.

Signed

13.1.06

Major Hla Aung

Deputy Commander

Gk' Hsaw Wah battalion

¹²⁶ See *Villagers displaced as SPDC offensive expands into Papun District* (KAREN HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP #2006-B4, May 2006)

¹²⁷ "DKBA called on to focus on agriculture," *The Myanmar Times*, August 28th – September 3rd 2006. Accessed at <http://www.myanmar.com/myanmartimes/MyanmarTimes17-331/n009.htm> on March 2nd 2007.



Villagers from Wah Tho Klah village in Dweh Loh township of southwestern Papun District manufacture, collect and deliver 3,000 shingles of roofing thatch along with 100,000 kyat of extortion money to DKBA K'Saw Wah Battalion Commander Htoo Lu on January 20th 2006. Htoo Lu told them the money was to buy chairs for the DKBA camp, and the shingles are for roofing their camp buildings - but the number of shingles is much higher than would be needed for the camp, so it is likely he will sell many of them for personal profit. *[Photo: KHRG]*



“K’Saw Wah battalion of DKBA Brigade #777 forced villagers from Keh Daw to clear their rubber plantation. They order the villagers to clear it for them twice a year. It takes three days to finish clearing the plantation. The DKBA also forced the villagers to build three houses for them. Even though they forced the villagers to do this for them, they didn’t give them any tools. The villagers had to bring their own tools, and they also forced the villagers to bring 60 logs of wood, 1,500 shingles of leaves and split bamboo to build houses for the DKBA.”

– Saw S--- (male, 45), K---- village, Papun District (March 2006)

Using ‘tax’ gates riddled throughout DKBA-controlled areas of Karen State, soldiers systematically fleece traders and all who pass for arbitrary ‘transit fees’. Along roads such as the Myawaddy – Pa’an vehicle road, where the DKBA operates public transport services under permission from the SPDC, only those riding the DKBA car are exempted from extortion at the DKBA checkpoints – unless they are carrying trade goods, in which case they still have to pay. The money made from such extortion then funds further DKBA expansion which the DKBA and the SPDC label as ‘development’.

“DKBA Company Commander Ti Pu Aung forced the villagers to come and collect tax for them at the jetty. They demanded one villager every day to come to the jetty and collect tax for them. The boats that travel in that river have to pay tax. A boat has to pay 200 kyat if it doesn’t carry anything in it and 1,000 kyat if it carries things [trade goods]. They forced the villagers to collect tax for them every day.”

– Saw M--- (male, 44), L--- village, Thaton District (Jan 2006)

“The DKBA army camp which is next to our village is in Kya-In. From our village it takes one and a half hours to reach Kya-In. The DKBA troops are from DKBA [Special Battalion] #907 under Captain T’Kee. They act as sentries for the gate and collected tax on the vehicles that go on the road. They collect 3,000 kyat per car and 200 kyat per cart.”

– Naw L--- (female, 34), T--- village, Doooplaya District (Dec 2005)

“We need to buy goods from Mudon and along the way there are four SPDC checkpoints, one DKBA checkpoint and one of the KPF. From Mudon to our village costs about 15,000 kyat in checkpoint fees. A truck carrying wood, charcoal or rubber has to pay at least 50,000 kyat in fees.”

– Saw S--- (male, 58), P--- village, Doooplaya District (Jan 2006)

The DKBA also implements agricultural, health, education and road development programmes similar to those enforced by the SPDC. In some areas, the DKBA has been contracted for money by the SPDC to oversee the building of new roads, which it then carries out by demanding forced labour from villages. Such DKBA ‘development’ work has been used by the SPDC to justify its support for the group in state-controlled media. Given that Burma is a majority Buddhist country, the DKBA’s construction of pagodas under the banner of ‘development’ has been one area in particular exploited in State

media to garner popular appeal. Many DKBA officers have at least one pagoda-building project going on at any given time, always involving forced labour and extortion of materials from villagers. Many of those forced to do the work are Karen Buddhists, but object nonetheless to the coercive and unsustainable nature of the projects; while some DKBA officers appear to enjoy forcing Christians to build pagodas. Such construction works have frequently been a means of countering Christian practices within Karen communities. Overall, the pagoda building projects have garnered no legitimacy for the DKBA among the villagers forced to build them, because the way these projects are implemented runs counter to the religion the DKBA claims to support. Such pagodas frequently sit atop mountains, and the soldiers have forced villagers to carry building supplies up to the summit.

"The other problem was DKBA #999 battalion #4 brigadier Pah Nwee and his Company's 2nd in command Toe Heh encouraged novice [monk] Ton Lone Kyaw to build a pagoda in the front of our P--- village church."

– Saw T--- (male, 32), P--- village, Pa'an District (Nov 2005)

"The DKBA forced the villagers to carry sand for them to build a pagoda. They forced one person from each family to do this. We had to carry sand to Meh Kyi. Every village was forced to carry sand for the DKBA. This was ordered by the DKBA commanders Lay Htoo and Sa Cha. They said that one person had to carry three times in the morning and three times in the evening. We had to carry it from the base of the mountain up to the top of the mountain."

– U M--- (male, 48), village head, T--- village, Thaton District (Feb 2006)

By relying on the DKBA to control some Karen areas, the SPDC has effectively farmed out the work of repressing the civilian population. The DKBA follows the SPDC practice of systematising control through taxes, forced labour and restrictions on movement – all of which soldiers enforce through the threat and use of violence. This allows the SPDC to concentrate its forces elsewhere, while also serving the purposes of 'divide and rule' by having Karen villagers oppressed by Karen soldiers from a Karen armed organisation. The SPDC has furthermore justified its patronage of the DKBA on the grounds that the latter is a positive force in the development of rural areas of Karen State. Villagers forced to live under DKBA subjugation, however, consistently reject such claims. Not only do the DKBA's development programmes involve widespread abuse of the civilian population, but they furthermore serve to entrench a system of control based on fear and the use of force that undermines the options of villagers to resist abuse and claim their rights.

"When the DKBA enters the village, we are very afraid of them. If it is someone [a soldier] that we know, we don't feel as afraid, but if it is someone that we don't know, we are very afraid of them."

– Naw M--- (female, 50), K--- village, Thaton District (Feb 2006)

"The DKBA soldiers are worse than the SPDC. If the SPDC demands from the villagers one viss [1.6 kg] of pork or chicken, we can give them

half a viss, but if the DKBA demands from the villagers one viss and if we give them only half a viss, they get angry... In my experience, the villagers and the village head feel more afraid of the DKBA than of the SPDC."

– Naw B--- (female, 45), secretary, K--- village, Thaton District (Feb 2006)

IV. Legal Framework

The military abuses perpetrated in the implementation of the SPDC's development agenda as well as the subsequent control and restrictions arising out of this implementation violate international human rights law as enshrined in both the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. To date however, Burma has neither ratified nor signed either of these documents. Nevertheless, specific military abuses committed as part of the regime's development programme are circumscribed by international legal treaties to which Burma is a State Party as well as principles of customary international law, which bind all states irrespective of their individual ratification status. With respect to this report, the relevant treaties to which Burma is a State Party include, *inter alia*, the 1932 Convention concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour (ILO Convention 29), the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the 1981 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The 1932 Forced Labour Convention (ILO Convention 29)

By ratifying the Convention concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour in 1955, Burma bound itself under international law to the provisions enshrined therein. While not an absolute proscription against the use of forced labour, the Convention is more accurately a set of criteria under which this form of labour may be utilised. According to the Convention, forced labour refers to “*all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily*” (Article 1). The forms in which forced labour is exacted as part of the SPDC's development agenda transgress numerous articles within the treaty. However, for the purpose of this report, the most pertinent restrictions imposed on the SPDC's use of forced labour are qualified under Articles 4, 11 and 19.

According to Article 4.1 of the Convention, “*The competent authority shall not impose or permit the imposition of forced or compulsory labour for the benefit of private individuals, companies or associations.*” By ordering civilians to labour on large-scale agricultural fields and plantations belonging to private business, such as the Thaton rubber plantation operated by Max Myanmar, the SPDC regularly violates this article. The perpetration of forced labour by the DKBA, as a non-state actor under the patronage of the SPDC, likewise violates this article as the responsibility to enforce the principles of the Forced Labour Convention falls back on the State authority. Article 11.1 of the Convention requires that “*Only adult able-bodied males who are of an apparent age of not less than 18 and not more than 45 years may be called upon for forced or compulsory labour.*” The SPDC military violates this prohibition by regularly employing women, children and the elderly in forced labour on development projects throughout Karen State. Lastly, Article 19.1 of the Convention requires that “*The competent authority shall only authorise recourse to compulsory*

cultivation as a method of precaution against famine or a deficiency of food supplies and always under the condition that the food or produce shall remain the property of the individuals or the community producing it.” The SPDC has regularly contravened this proscription by forcing civilians to labour on agricultural fields in support of either local military units or private business interests. As a State Party to the Forced Labour Convention, the SPDC is furthermore obliged to punish as a penal offence any instance where these articles are breached (Article 25). To date however, the SPDC has refrained from prosecuting, punishing or even initiating investigations against any military official over the perpetration of forced labour. Though civilians have in a few cases succeeded in bringing civil cases against civilian SPDC authorities, the regime has not yet allowed a single case to be brought against a military official.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

In July 1991, two years after the 1989 drafting of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the wake of widespread international support for the treaty, Burma’s ruling SLORC regime acceded to the Convention, thereby becoming a State Party bound to the articles enumerated therein. In recognition of children’s need for *“special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection”* the Convention lists 54 articles in support of children’s rights. Although the regime regularly violates many of these articles, two of them are particularly pertinent to the perpetration of the abuse under the SPDC’s development agenda. Article 24.1 of the treaty declares that *“States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.”* By confiscating and destroying civilian medical supplies and razing and restricting the construction of non-SPDC medical clinics, the SPDC effectively obstructs children’s access to *“the highest attainable standard of health.”* Furthermore, the SPDC’s confiscation of school supplies, restriction on the expansion of existing schools and obstruction of education by commandeering schools for military purposes are all in violation of *“the right of the child to education”* for which primary education must be *“compulsory and available free to all”* and for which higher education must be accessible to all on the bases of merit as enshrined under Article 28.1.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

With the 1981 entry into force of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), States Parties committed themselves to legally binding measures requiring the execution of steps necessary to eradicate gender inequities in their respective countries. Through its 1997 accession to this treaty, Burma became likewise bound to the provisions listed therein. In its preamble, the Convention states that *“in*

situations of poverty women have the least access to food, health, education, training and opportunities for employment and other needs.” The abuses and restrictions imposed by the SPDC under the rubric of development which exacerbate poverty and undermine civilians’ livelihoods are thus particularly pernicious to women. To counter such imbalances, CEDAW requires, for instance, in relation to military restrictions on medical facilities and the possession of medical supplies and restrictions on movement which effectively block access to health care facilities, that States Parties “*ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services*” (Article 12).

Under CEDAW provisions, women have the right “*To participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels*” (Article 14.2.a). The regular neglect of women’s, and indeed any civilian, voices in the framing of development policy thus transgresses this requirement. Given the disparate effects of abuse on women and men CEDAW furthermore obliges States Parties “*take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women*” (Article 3). The SPDC’s general disregard for the deleterious social, economic and cultural fallout of the multifarious military development schemes which particularly affect women, contravene this requirement.¹²⁸ Indeed, the SPDC consistently violates these and other CEDAW prohibitions and requirements through its abuse of the civilian population of Karen State. Moreover, the obligation on States Parties to submit regular reports on the situation of women’s rights in their country and the measures taken to implement CEDAW requirements is one of the principle means for monitoring and enforcement provided for within the framework of the Convention. To date, however, the SPDC has submitted only one such report and remains over four and a half years overdue on their second obligatory submission.¹²⁹

Customary International Humanitarian Law

As globally accepted rules governing the use of force in armed conflict, customary international humanitarian law (IHL), as distinct from treaty law, forms a set of prohibitions on parties to armed conflict, irrespective of their ratification of any given convention. Such rules become binding within the framework of customary IHL when they reflect prohibitions generally accepted as law, determined by widespread and consistent practice and a belief that the rule is binding. In 2005, the International Committee of the Red Cross released a 5,000-page study identifying 161 rules now accepted as binding under

¹²⁸ For further background on the particular effects of military abuse on women in Karen State, the manner in which they have responded to such abuse and the way these abuses and responses have combined to change their roles within Karen society see *Dignity in the Shadow of Oppression: The abuse and agency of Karen women under militarisation*, (Karen Human Rights Group, November 2006).

¹²⁹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Sixty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly, September 21st 2006, p.19. Accessed at <http://www.un.org/ga/61/third/documentslist.shtml> on February 6th 2007.

customary IHL.¹³⁰ Many of the laws forming the current corpus of customary IHL are applicable in both international and non-international armed conflict, such as that currently ongoing in Karen State.

As the junta has defended its development programme as a corollary of its 'anti-insurgency' campaign and the establishment of peace in Karen areas, numerous prohibitions against the use of force within customary IHL are applicable to the SPDC's campaign of enforcing development in Karen areas. For the purpose of this report, three such prohibitions, applicable in non-international armed conflict, are especially relevant. Regarding the destruction of crop fields, food stores and food storage equipment by SPDC and DKBA soldiers, customary IHL asserts "*Attacking, destroying, removing or rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population are prohibited*"¹³¹ Furthermore, SPDC restrictions imposed on international agencies seeking to address the humanitarian crisis raging throughout Karen State violate the requirement that "*The parties to the conflict must allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need, which is impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction, subject to their right of control.*"¹³² Although in practice this access requires the consent of parties to the conflict, these parties cannot legally refuse such consent on arbitrary grounds, such as the SPDC's regular claim that some aid may fall into the hands of opposition forces.¹³³ In addition Customary IHL obliges that "*In case of displacement, all possible measures must be taken in order that the civilians concerned are received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition and that members of the same family are not separated.*"¹³⁴ However, relocation sites for the internment of forcibly displaced villagers in Karen areas set up and controlled by SPDC forces are cramped, fenced-in quarters lacking clean water and sanitation facilities where civilians are furthermore restricted from accessing adequate arable land.

The regular abuse of civilians in Karen areas and the restrictions the military imposes on them as well as on humanitarian agencies seeking to assist them not only belie the argument that such military action is justified on the basis of development but furthermore contravene numerous international laws, both treaty and customary in nature, to which Burma is bound. The SPDC's obligations under international law thus necessitate an immediate cessation of these abuses. Notwithstanding this obligation, and given the ongoing abuse of the citizens of Burma by state authorities in transgression of international law, the responsibility for protection of this population now rests with the international community.

¹³⁰ Jean-Marie Henckaerts and Louise Doswald-Beck. 2005. *Customary International Humanitarian Law: Rules, Volume I*. Cambridge University Press.

¹³¹ Ibid., Rule 54

¹³² Ibid., Rule 55

¹³³ Ibid., p.197

¹³⁴ Ibid., Rule 131

V. Conclusion

“As these areas have become peaceful and tranquil, development works and nation-building tasks are being carried out there with momentum.”

– SPDC press statement (June 2006)¹³⁵

“The SPDC never comes to our village to improve or develop the village. They never give us suggestions on how to improve the village. They never think to rebuild the school, the monastery or the village road. They come to the village only to eat the villagers’ things.”

– K--- (male, 30), village secretary, G--- village, Doooplaya District (Dec 2006)

Given the consistent civilian resistance to SPDC-implemented development programmes, claims by external actors – be they foreign governments, UN agencies or international NGOs – that it is ethically imperative to provide aid for only officially-sanctioned initiatives ignore the political implications of their decisions and actions. Unqualified support for SPDC development programmes can undermine the rights of local peoples in a manner supportive of continued military repression. By wilfully ignoring the politics of regime control and civilian resistance within which the SPDC implements development schemes, external actors wishing to ameliorate living conditions in Burma risk exacerbating the humanitarian crisis, deepening poverty and undermining the rights of those whose lives they ostensibly aim to promote.

In a welcome admission of the importance of local politics in the implementation of international development programmes, the World Bank recognised in 2006 that its poor success rate in improving living conditions in ‘fragile states’ such as Burma arose from the fact that *“the Bank has not yet sufficiently internalized political understanding in strategy design and implementation.”*¹³⁶ Such statements should not be taken to mean, however, that large international agencies such as the World Bank have abandoned their state-centric proclivities, as they continue to support authoritarian development at the expense of local peoples.

International agencies operating through Rangoon are only allowed to operate under the terms of their Memorandum of Understanding with the SPDC, and the regime uses this to its advantage in restricting and manipulating the activities of these agencies. Projects are only approved in areas where the state is confident of its control, or when they serve the purpose of extending state control further into marginal areas. Agencies are often prevented from performing adequate monitoring or consultation with local people without

¹³⁵ “Press Conference: Entire Mon State and most areas of Kayin State are peaceful, tranquil Residential people there are enjoying fruitful results of development endeavours,” Press Conference, June 11th 2006. Accessed at <http://www.myanmar.com/pressconference/index.html> on March 2nd.

¹³⁶ *Engaging with Fragile States: An IEG Review of World Bank Support to Low-Income Countries Under Stress*, The World Bank, 2006, p. 63

military intervention. However, the politics of aid funding is such that many agencies feel compelled to spend their budgets on time and to report every project a 'success' regardless of its actual outcomes. As a result, the increased repression and loss of rights facilitated by development projects is frequently glossed over while any short-term benefits to the local population are emphasised, if not exaggerated. Rather than 'downward' accountability to local people who have no freedom of expression in Burma, accountability only flows 'upward', to the SPDC and project donors. As for transparency, those enquiring into the details of agency projects, as KHRG tried to do regarding the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's possible involvement in forced castor bean planting, are met with a wall of silence, evasions or vague and unconvincing denials, but never with detailed facts. Agencies claim to be 'apolitical' and to practice 'humanitarian neutrality' while refusing to operate in areas beyond state control or without specific state permission, to hire employees not approved by state authorities, or to work with local groups not approved by the state. This is not to say that beneficial aid cannot be delivered in such circumstances, but that the political nature of such aid needs to be acknowledged and it is hypocrisy to pretend that it can be 'neutral' or 'apolitical'. Assisting people in such an environment requires an organisation's judgement to be fully active and engaged and that agencies establish fundamental operating principles which they are not prepared to sacrifice, not that they close their eyes to the political situation and 'bend with the wind'.

In contrast to the politically myopic approach of large-scale international development agendas, external agencies which listen to local voices and work to understand the strategies these people use to resist abusive development programmes and claim their rights, as are regularly documented in KHRG reports, can more ably develop appropriate policies of intervention. To be sure, the peoples of Burma could greatly benefit from increased aid and development assistance. However, only where such work is implemented under the safeguards of transparency and accountability to the local population and avoids actions which undermine the strategies that these communities already employ to improve their situation and claim their rights, can it in any way be defended as legitimate. Moreover, by providing external support for local response strategies international assistance will not only prove more effective in addressing the humanitarian crisis and unnecessary poverty, but moreover bolster the efforts of local peoples in claiming their rights and resisting ongoing military abuse.