

Commentary

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Civilians as Targets

“Now the SPDC has come up to burn houses and kill villagers. They’re not here to shoot KNLA soldiers.” – Karen National Liberation Army officer, Papun district

A major military offensive is now going on, launched by Burma’s State Peace & Development Council (SPDC) military regime and focused on northern Karen State. It began in November – as SPDC offensives usually do, in early dry season – with SPDC columns shelling and burning Karen villages in southeastern Toungoo district. Even villagers in SPDC-controlled villages were prohibited from travelling along the roads in an apparent attempt to starve villagers out of the hills. In February, a parallel offensive was launched throughout Nyaunglebin district, also focused on destroying civilian villages, food supplies and ricefields. Over 15,000 villagers have now been displaced in these two districts, and more are on the move each day. The offensive is still spreading: in April and May, more troops have been sent into Papun district and have started attacking villages there, and now 27 SPDC battalions totalling 4,000-5,000 troops are poised to launch a new wave of attacks against villages in this district. Unlike most SPDC offensives, the signs are that this one will continue straight through the monsoon season despite the difficulties of moving and supplying troops in these mountainous forests without roads.

“We usually went to buy our food at Kaw Thay Der. ... Now we cannot go and dare not go to buy our food because the SPDC is blocking the way and prohibiting any food being carried anywhere. We have no food to eat now. There are nine villages of people facing this problem.” – 56 year old male villager from central Toungoo district, March 2006

“When the Burmese soldiers arrived in the village they didn’t say anything, except that they had to burn down the houses according to their orders from above. They burned down the houses but not all the houses. They burned down 14 houses, and we were able to save some of our possessions but some we couldn’t.” – 45 year old male villager from northern Nyaunglebin district, December 2005.

For more detail on the SPDC offensive in these regions, see:

Villagers displaced as SPDC offensive expands into Papun district (KHRG #2006-B4, 16/5/06)
SPDC operations in Kler Lweh Htoo (Nyaunglebin) district (KHRG #2006-F4, 30/4/06)
Recent attacks on villages in southeastern Toungoo district (KHRG #2006-B3, 16/3/06)

Suddenly no one is talking about the SPDC-KNU (Karen National Union) ceasefire any more, and it appears well and truly dead. Some media outlets have stated that “talks broke down in 2005”, but the ceasefire was never a process of ongoing talks: an informal agreement was reached in January 2004, and from that point on the SPDC consistently refused to take part in any further talks. Meanwhile, the regime consistently violated the agreement by encroaching its troops into agreed KNU areas without permission and attacking Karen forces on occasion. The ceasefire was used as cover for SPDC expansion. Roads into remote areas were improved with bulldozers or the forced labour of villagers; new SPDC Army camps were established in areas the regime had never been able to control; and instead of pulling troops out, more were sent in and weapons and supplies were stockpiled – all done while KNLA forces looked on, unable to attack because of their orders to observe the ceasefire. What we are now seeing is the dividend of the SPDC’s military buildup under the ceasefire. The improved roads are being used to supply troops and supplies to the new camps, which in turn are being used to launch columns into the surrounding hills to depopulate the villages. The objective is control, not of the ground or the resistance forces, but of the civilian population. As a paranoid military regime, the SPDC wants to force them out of the uncontrollable hills and down to the roadsides, where they can be subjected to direct and daily military control, forced labour and extortion. To the SPDC mentality, this is the proper role of civilians in society – to support the Army in all things.

“On 13/2/2006 LIB [Light Infantry Battalion] #642 Strategic Operations Commander Myo Win, who is based in Papun, ordered his soldiers based at Meh T’Roh to establish more army camps. They had already confiscated 6 farms close to Meh T’Roh village and established their army camp there. Now they are planning to establish more army camps, and as they don’t have enough space, they will relocate the Meh T’Roh villagers to Nyi Pu beside the Bway Loh Kloh [Yunzalin River]. This will make the villagers suffer even more problems, because there are 86 households with more than 1,000 villagers. Some of the village houses are made of wood [i.e. they are permanent and expensive], and those houses will be destroyed. Recently we heard that after they set up new army camps around Meh T’Roh, they plan to establish more in Bweh Kla village. In Bweh Kla area there are 492 households with more than 1,200 villagers. So if they start setting up army camps, more than 2,200 villagers will be faced with big problems, some will suffer from hunger and some will die.” – village head Saw M---, Papun district, February 2006

“There are now five SPDC base camps around our village. The names of those camps are Tha Aye Hta camp, K’Law Kyo camp, Thay Mu Paw Kyo camp, Thay Mu Ko camp and [unclear].” – 23 year old male villager, central Toungoo district, March 2006

In the villages which have been attacked since November, the usual SPDC tactic has been to approach the village, fire mortar shells into it without warning, then fire mortar shells along adjacent ridgetops or streambeds which villagers might use as escape routes. The troops then enter the villages firing small arms at the houses, livestock and any villagers sighted, even if children, women or the elderly. The column then loots the houses for food and valuables before setting them alight. Each column is accompanied by civilians doing forced labour as porters – many of whom are convicts taken from Burma’s prisons – and these porters are forced to carry the loot along with the soldiers’ equipment and supplies. Rice and other food in excess of what the soldiers want is left to burn or scattered on the ground to destroy it. Some livestock are killed and eaten, others shot and left wounded or dead, because a major

purpose of the operation is to destroy anything the villagers could use as food. The troops sometimes camp overnight in the village before burning it but once it is burned they depart, often leaving landmines to maim or kill any villagers who attempt to return. Along the way, the column searches for the rice storage barns where villagers conceal most of their harvest in the forest, usually near fields or footpaths, and when found the rice is scattered and destroyed and the barn is burned. Farmfield huts, which stand alone in the ricefields and where families reside during the growing season, are also burned whenever found along with everything in them. Villagers sighted in the hills of the offensive area are either captured and forced to accompany the troops as porters, guides and human minesweepers, or shot on sight and left to die. Some ricefields have been booby-trapped with landmines to kill any villagers who attempt to cultivate or harvest them. Free Burma Ranger medical teams in Nyaunglebin district have also reported finding the SPDC notice shown below posted to trees, some of which are booby-trapped with landmines to kill or maim whoever approaches to read the notice.¹

“For the hiding villagers”

- 1) No one is allowed to live in this area.
- 2) People must move to Mu Theh [an SPDC Army base] or beside the car road at the relocation site as soon as possible, by 5 May.
- 3) Our troops do not want to shoot and capture.
- 4) By this date (5 May) anyone who stays in this area will be shot. This is a command from above.
- 5) You can come back when this area has peace.

“The SPDC soldiers are very active so the villagers had to quickly run for their lives and were not able to take much food with them. In December the villagers had to eat rice soup with vegetables that they could find in the forest. They didn’t have time to take their blankets with them, so they had to sleep out in the cold and get chills at night. They did not dare to light fires to keep warm because they were afraid that the SPDC would see the smoke from the fires and fire shells at them. I have heard that there are more SPDC soldiers arriving and that they will continue to be active throughout summer until the rains fall [in June], so the villagers who are running away now will have to continue hiding until the rainy season. ... The villagers who are fleeing to stay in the forest have no houses, not enough food, not enough blankets, and now the rain is falling and they are being bitten by insects [mosquitoes], so many of them have illnesses. Some of the elders are digging up roots and using traditional herbal medicines to treat those who are sick. These patients do not deserve to die, but some of them do without enough medicine.” – KHRG field researcher in Toungoo district, February 2006

Estimates by Free Burma Ranger medical teams in the offensive areas, corroborated by information gathered by KHRG field researchers, are that over 16,000 villagers have already been displaced in Toungoo, Nyaunglebin and Papun districts, with numbers increasing daily.² Dozens of villagers have already been shot dead or killed by SPDC landmines, but most have received information from other villagers or KNLA forces which has enabled them to escape

¹ “Sign and landmine placed to terrorize displaced villagers”, FBR, May 7th 2006, and “Three more ambush letters found with landmine”, FBR, May 11th 2006. Accessible at www.freeburmarangers.org.

² “Attacks continue in Toungoo district”, Free Burma Rangers, May 16th 2006.

before the columns reach their villages. About 2,000 of these have fled to or across the Thai border, but most are taking refuge in the hills and forests near home, either in their farmfield huts, in villages which have not yet been attacked, or deep in the forest. Most have no food, clothing or belongings except what they could carry on their backs, and no medicines. Only a trickle of aid carried across the border covertly from Thailand has thus far been able to reach them. However, for most of them this is far from the first time they have been displaced, and they are surviving using well-developed networks for sharing food and labour, caring for the most vulnerable, and continuing schooling for the children and religious worship even in the harshest conditions in the forest. Maintaining community activities like these is central to the villagers' survival and dignity, and visitors to their hiding places are often surprised to see children playing, students being taught from school blackboards leaned against trees, and to be offered food and hospitality as though they were visiting a prosperous village. But this occurs amid desperate food shortages and the villagers' knowledge that they or their children could step on a landmine or be shot on sight by an SPDC patrol at any time.

“Many villages have fled like us. After Burmese soldiers burnt our village we came to stay here. The villages which fled are Sho Ser, Wah Soe, Hee Daw Khaw, Kho Kee, Thay Kwee, Ha Toh Per, Der Koh Der, Bu Kee, Bu Hsa Kee and Klay Kee. All of those villagers are staying in the forest.” – Naw P---, woman from southern Toungoo district, interviewed in February 2006

Why?

The SPDC itself denied the existence of any offensive until May 13th, when information minister Brigadier General Kyaw Hsan stated, “We have to launch military offensives against the KNU because since early this year, the KNU stepped up its destructive acts such as exploding a series of bombs and laying mines on rail lines.”³ The KNU denies any involvement in these bombings, and the SPDC has produced no evidence. Over recent months the SPDC has blamed the bombings at various times on almost every opposition group in existence, including the National League for Democracy party of Nobel laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. On May 5th the SPDC-controlled daily *Kyemon* even claimed that former KNU vice-chairman Shwe Sai had held meetings in Thailand on April 28th to plan more bombings, despite the fact that Shwe Sai passed away on June 1st 2003.⁴ The sophisticated nature of the plastic explosives used in the bombings is in stark contrast to the homemade bombs of bamboo, PVC piping and shotgun pellets used by the KNLA for demolitions operations; moreover the targets chosen, which have included public railway stations and other public places but no military or government installations, would seem illogical for a resistance group dependent on public goodwill for its existence. A more likely scenario is that the SPDC military detonated the bombs to justify its military offensive, rather than the other way round. Anyone who is unwilling to believe that a government would deliberately blow up its own civilians for political motives need only look at the deliberate killing of civilians now occurring in Karen State. An Army which would landmine the front steps of a church, as was done in Hee Daw Khaw village of Toungoo district,⁵ and which would order the shooting on sight of children, is unlikely to have any qualms about planting a bomb in a railway station.

³ “Myanmar acknowledges attacking ethnic area”, Associated Press, May 14th 2006.

⁴ “Dead KNU man spooks Burmese sleuths”, The Irrawaddy, May 9th 2006.

⁵ See photos #1-32 and 1-33 in Section 1 of KHRG Photo Gallery: 2005 (KHRG, April 2006).

“When they [SPDC troops] arrived in our village, they ate the villagers’ livestock and if they caught villagers they would kill them. SPDC soldiers usually stay one week or one month in our village when they come. If they see villagers’ belongings they take or destroy them all. A few days ago, maybe the 23rd or 24th of February, the SPDC killed a villager beside my village. They captured that villager and cut off his arms and legs, and cut his throat.” – 23 year old male villager, central Toungoo district, March 2006

Many reports in the international media, meanwhile, have claimed that the offensive is motivated by the SPDC’s desire to secure its new capital at nearby Pyinmana. The first problem with this theory is that Pyinmana is not nearby – in fact, it is over 100 kilometres of SPDC-controlled territory away from the nearest destroyed villages of central Toungoo district, and up to 200 kilometres from villages now being destroyed in Papun district. Villages of Shwegyin township in southern Nyaunglebin district are now being burned for the third time in a year, despite being much closer to Rangoon than Pyinmana. Following the logic of the Pyinmana argument, these villagers should be enjoying a respite from attacks now that the capital has moved, but instead they are displaced in the forest, their homes burned once again. If securing Pyinmana were the objective, the attacks would be focused on villages in the far north of Toungoo district and the southwestern corner of Shan State, which is not the case. Rather than looking for the cause of the offensive in Pyinmana, it would be more productive to see the move to Pyinmana, this offensive, the increase in SPDC restrictions on the activities of international organisations, and SPDC demands for ceasefire groups to lay down their arms, all as parallel symptoms of a regime growing more hardline and paranoid by the day.

One factor that is probably related to the offensive is dams – both the new dam being built on the Thauk Yay Ka river in western Toungoo district,⁶ and the planned dams at Weh Gyi and Hat Gyi on the Salween River.⁷ The SPDC’s desire to secure the dam regions can explain some of the attacks, though it fails to explain attacks in areas far from dam access routes (such as Shwegyin township), and the lack of similar attacks in areas like southern Papun district, close to the Hat Gyi dam site.

“We have always faced problems. SPDC soldiers arrived in our village sometimes. When they came to our village they ate all the villagers’ livestock, whatever they saw. They did not give anything for the cost. When they came to our village they tortured our villagers and sometimes they sexually abused women. When they came they usually stayed one or two days and then left. A few days ago we heard that SPDC soldiers killed a Play Hsa Loh villager and cut off his legs and arms, and then they left that person beside the road because an SPDC soldier had been wounded by a landmine. ... There are about 1,000 SPDC soldiers staying there and making operations. The SPDC forces villagers to do many kinds of forced labour wherever they have camps.” – 45 year old woman villager, southeastern Toungoo district, March 2006

In determining the reasoning behind this offensive, a key indicator which has largely been ignored is that such attacks are not new. Ever since the current junta took power in 1988 it

⁶ See “Toungoo District: Civilians displaced by dams, roads, and military control”, KHRG #2005-F7, August 2005.

⁷ See “SPDC road construction plans creating problems for civilians”, KHRG #2006-B1, January 2006.

has used attacks against civilian villages in its efforts to gain control over Karen hill areas. By the late 1990s, SPDC military strategy in Karen areas was based on actively avoiding resistance forces and deliberately targeting civilians – depopulating regions which cannot be controlled, forcing civilians to garrisoned roadways which can be controlled, and then monitoring and exploiting them at your leisure. In 1997 over 200 Karen villages were systematically destroyed in Papun and eastern Nyaunglebin districts in an almost identical offensive, and since that time villages have been burned, displaced and forcibly relocated in these districts every year. The international media has ignored it, but it has been happening nonetheless. Those reporting that this is the worst offensive in ten years may not be aware of Operation *Than L'Yet* in 2002, when SPDC troops attacked civilian villages further south in Dooplaya district, forcibly relocating 60 villages, massacring villagers on several occasions and displacing well over 10,000 people.⁸ That offensive went almost completely unreported in the international media, because the SPDC (probably deliberately) timed its temporary release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to coincide with the attacks. Hundreds of international journalists were in Rangoon, but not one wrote about Operation *Than L'Yet* – instead the media were full of optimistic stories about a “new dawn” for Burma. That “new dawn” long ago turned back into night, but the world has a very short memory. Villages in southern Nyaunglebin district were already being attacked in early 2005,⁹ as were villages in southern Toungoo district,¹⁰ and some of these had been attacked almost yearly over the past five to eight years.

“The SPDC came to abuse us and persecute us so we have always faced trouble in our area. We must flee and stay in the forest and sometimes we starve because we have no food, and we have to eat very poorly in our lives. SPDC troops have arrived in our village many times, sometimes they destroyed our village, and now they have burned our village.” – 65 year old male villager, southeastern Toungoo district, March 2006

In short, this offensive is not so much about eradicating armed resistance as it is about bringing the civilian population under control so they can be put at the service of the Army and military authorities. It is a continuation of a long term campaign which has never ceased over the last ten years, but has now been spurred to new intensity by the SPDC military buildup during the ceasefire combined with the increasingly hardline approach of the SPDC leadership. This is why civilian villages and villagers are the targets rather than the resistance armies. The only problem, as far as the SPDC is concerned, is that the strategy doesn't work. Villagers may appear helpless and easy to control, but every time they hide their food or flee into the forest instead of moving to the roadside this upsets the entire plan. Villagers in hiding cannot be used for forced labour, they are not available for extortion, you cannot even send them an order or catch them. Worse yet, they provide an example to others. They are probably the biggest thorn in the side of the SPDC, which is perhaps why SPDC leaders routinely label them “terrorists” or “KNU families”, why they must be “crushed” or simply killed.

⁸ See “Operation *Than L'Yet*: Forced displacement, massacres and forced labour in Dooplaya district”, KHRG #2002-U5, September 2002.

⁹ See “Nyaunglebin District: SPDC operations along the Shwegyin River, and the villagers' response”, KHRG #2005-F8, December 2005.

¹⁰ See “‘Peace’, or Control? The SPDC's use of the Karen ceasefire to expand its control and repression of villagers in Toungoo district, northern Karen State”, KHRG #2005-F3, March 2005.

Who are the villagers?

On April 26th 2006, news agency Reuters labelled all of the villages in Toungoo district currently being attacked by Burmese troops as “ethnic rebel villages”,¹¹ implying that everyone living there must be an “ethnic rebel”. At the other end of the spectrum, on May 17th Agence France Presse claimed that “The military and ethnic Karen rebels have been locked in fierce combat since February”¹² and implied that the displacement of villagers is collateral damage to this “combat”, that it is not the villagers themselves who are being attacked and that they are uninvolved bystanders. Which of these perceptions is more accurate? KHRG interviews with villagers over the past 14 years clearly contradict the Reuters perception; most villagers are certainly not ‘ethnic rebels’, but view themselves as peaceful farmers and long for physical security and freedom from human rights abuses. As shown above, the AFP slant on the situation is also highly inaccurate: the villagers are the targets of the offensive, not the armed ‘rebels’, as indicated by the SPDC Army’s tendency to actively *avoid* armed encounters with KNLA forces in favour of attacking undefended villages. As for AFP’s claim that the two sides have been “locked in fierce combat” for the past three months, this is a totally false representation of the situation. The KNLA in the region are small in number and could not survive any prolonged combat with the thousands of SPDC troops; instead, the KNLA has deployed its troops mainly to provide security for displaced villagers in hiding and those returning to their fields and villages to retrieve food supplies. The only armed clashes between SPDC and KNLA forces since February have occurred either when an SPDC column surprises a KNLA unit or a group of villagers with a KNLA escort, or when KNLA troops want to slow an SPDC advance to allow villagers time to escape. The modern KNLA, after all, is more a ‘resistance’ army seeking to protect Karen State from SPDC incursion than an ‘insurgent’ army seeking to lay siege to Pyinmana and thereby topple the regime. The villagers use their own lookouts and their KNLA connections for security and information, as a way of evading the SPDC onslaught.

“When the SPDC burned our houses we fled and stayed in the forest. Villagers never want to meet with SPDC soldiers. The distance between the SPDC soldier camp and us takes about one and half or two hours to walk, so we have no security staying here. We stay with fearful hearts and we always have our belongings packed in baskets because if we have to run we will take them with us. The biggest problems for us are that we have no food, no security, no medicines and no school.”

– 56 year old displaced male villager, central Toungoo district, March 2006

Does this make the villagers combatants? Certainly they are resisting SPDC control over their land and lives, most often by staying one step ahead of SPDC troops but also by hiding their food, sharing information with the KNLA and in some extreme circumstances even using machetes, hunting rifles, or KNLA-supplied landmines to keep their attackers away; but they are not combatants either in their own perception or in most conventional ideas of armed conflict. Their actions could more accurately be considered as an active way of claiming human rights at local level, by doing whatever is necessary to evade abuses and minimise their effects. To treat the villagers as helpless bystanders to their own context is to ignore their strengths; but having strengths and evading control does not make one a soldier, and certainly does not justify military attacks on people. Understanding the position of Karen

¹¹ “Myanmar troops attack rebel villages, thousands flee”, Reuters, April 26th 2006.

¹² “Burma must halt offensive against minority rebels: UN rights experts”, Agence France Presse, May 17th 2006.

villagers in this context requires understanding how they view the SPDC state and other armed actors. If you start from common foreign assumptions, the tendency is to ask the wrong questions and come to the wrong conclusions.

For example, most ‘Westerners’ have trouble with the concept that part of the map can be (and traditionally has been in Asia) what James Scott has called ‘nonstate space’,¹³ where some state claims territorial rights but has no presence or capacity to enforce the claim. Most of Karen State was like this until at least the late 1980s. From the perspective of a Karen hill village, sovereignty resides at the local level, and a ‘state’ is a distant thing to which they are not answerable. This comes from a long history of living in ‘nonstate space’ while the distant state was a hostile and foreign entity. The SPDC is not the ‘government’; neither is the KNU. SPDC attempts to exert territorial control over villagers who do not see it as the government have led to noncooperation, displacement, and active resistance. Similarly, it is when the KNU starts acting too much like a government that it runs into noncooperation from the villagers of the kind that led to the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) mutiny in 1994. The DKBA’s initial aims, as stated by one of its soldiers to KHRG, were not to replace the KNU or become a government, but to get rid of the KNU and then of the Burmese.¹⁴

“When SPDC came to our village they destroyed the villagers’ livestock and paddy. They burnt our village and our church also. If SPDC soldiers eat a villager’s cow or buffalo they don’t pay anything for the cost. Villagers are afraid to meet with SPDC soldiers because if SPDC soldiers see villagers they arrest the villagers, and they torture and kill those villagers.” – 56 year old male villager from central Toungoo district, March 2006.

When outsiders bring their territorial conceptions of sovereignty with them they tend to ask the wrong questions, like ‘Do you support the KNU?’ They often get either rehearsed or nebulous answers to this question from villagers, because it is the wrong question to ask. Most villagers may not support the idea of the KNU as government, but they do support the KNU as their protector, as a force to protect them from oppression and drive the Burmese state out of their area so they can control their own land and lives. Maintaining relationships with the KNU or KNLA or any other armed group is often a survival strategy rather than a political statement. A more open line of questioning that asks villagers what they really want more often leads to an answer that they want the state, any state, off their backs and respect for the village-level right to control territory and resources – an approach that has been dubbed in academic circles ‘the territorial approach’, and which is gaining currency in international discourse on indigenous land rights. Any consideration of this situation has to begin from an understanding of these state-society relationships. Otherwise the wrong questions, and misinterpretation of the answers, lead to the wrong conclusions and the wrong ‘solutions’.

“The SPDC looks upon us civilians as their enemies. My view of the SPDC is that they are a terrorist group, they are terrorists and abusers. The KNU looks upon us civilians as their friends and part of their organisation, so my view of the KNU is that they are good to us and don’t abuse us.” – 56 year old male villager, central Toungoo district, March 2006

¹³ James C. Scott (1998) *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 187.

¹⁴ Karen Human Rights Group (1995) *SLORC’s Northern Karen Offensive*. Thailand: KHRG, March 1995, report #95-10, p. 18.

Those who adopt a ‘one-or-the-other’ approach tend to either deplore the KNU and see villagers living peacefully under a Burmese state as the solution, or advocate Karen ‘autonomy’ via KNU governance over local areas – neither of which adequately recognises villagers’ traditional local sovereignty models. Most villagers do not deplore the role of the KNU/KNLA, and therefore outsiders should not deplore it either, nor should they deplore villagers’ ties to the KNU/KNLA; yet they should not assume that this means villagers see the KNU as their government. Most villagers do, however, deplore encroachment of SPDC authority into their areas because it is abusive and predatory, so international organisations should not act in a way that facilitates such encroachment, like helping the SPDC extend roads further into the hills or providing aid that sustains the existence of SPDC-run forced relocation sites. In the end the best way to assist villagers is to support them in resisting control or oppression by any group, by supporting the strategies they have developed themselves for doing so without trying to tell them who they should support or where or how they should live.

Calculation vs. solidarity

When the SPDC carefully timed its release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in 2002 to divert media attention away from its offensive against Karen villages in Dooplaya district, the resulting media blackout on any reporting of the massacres and forced relocation of 60 villages must have been a greater strategic success than even the SPDC generals could have hoped for. It is possible that they hoped for the same effect this time, and it might have worked if they had been willing to release her again – but with their fear of Daw Suu preventing any possibility of releasing her, they apparently hoped that the move of the capital to Pyinmana would be sufficient to divert media attention. If so, this was a terrible miscalculation because Pyinmana only provided the media a ‘hook’ for the Karen story – and in the end, the world has become more interested in the houses SPDC leaders are burning in Karen State than in the mansions they are building for themselves in Pyinmana. While the situation in Karen State becomes increasingly desperate, the outpouring of anger, sympathy and solidarity from Karen, Burmese, and other concerned people worldwide has been encouraging, and the media’s near-unprecedented focus on the plight of Karen villagers is now leading some to hope that maybe, just maybe, “they finally see us as newsworthy.” The villagers continue to suffer, but they also continue to stand, and we can only hope and pray that change will come.

Karen Districts



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Scale: 1 cm to 22 km
1 in. to 35 miles