

Cycles of Displacement

Forced relocation and civilian responses in Nyaunglebin District



Karen Human Rights Group
Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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January 2009

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Front Cover Photo: Residents of Dt'Kaw Bpwah, Mone township, Nyaunglebin District construct a perimeter fence around their village amidst rising flood waters in August 2006 as ordered by SPDC LIB #599. Such fences prevent residents from easily slipping in and out of their villages to tend farm fields, evade forced labour demands or flee into hiding.

Rear Cover Photo: Noh Ghaw village, Nyaunglebin District as seen on March 1st 2007 shortly after being dismantled by local residents whom SPDC personnel forcibly relocated to a military-controlled site. The SPDC often orders villagers to dismantle homes and other structures prior to relocating.

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Preface

Over the past three years, the Burma Army has conducted an extensive forced relocation campaign in Nyaunglebin District. As part of the wider offensive in northern Karen State, the forced relocations in Nyaunglebin District have aimed to bring the region's entire civilian population into more easily controllable settlements in the plains, along vehicle roads and alongside army camps and bases. Local villagers, however, have resisted these efforts in numerous ways. Villagers' resistance strategies include: fleeing into hiding to evade forced relocation; negotiating with local SPDC commanders to avoid relocation or garner increased freedom of movement at relocation sites; and covertly leaving relocation sites to temporarily or permanently return to their former homes and lands. The Burma Army's attacks against civilian communities in hiding, combined with forced relocation efforts and civilian evasion in Nyaunglebin District, have created ongoing cycles of displacement.

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Terms and Abbreviations

IB	Infantry Battalion of the SPDC Army
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army; armed wing of the KNU
KNU	Karen National Union; main Karen opposition group
LIB	Light Infantry Battalion of the SPDC Army
LID	Light Infantry Division of the SPDC Army; consists of 10 battalions
MOC	Military Operations Command; 10 battalions for offensive operations
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council; military junta ruling Burma
TOC	Tactical Operations Command; 3 battalions under MOC
TPDC	Township Peace and Development Council
VPDC	Village Peace and Development Council
baht	Thai currency; US \$1 equals approx. 35 baht at current market rate
big tin	Unit of volume used to measure paddy, husked rice and seeds. One big tin of paddy equals 10.45 kg. / 23.04 lb. in weight. One big tin of husked rice equals 16 kg. / 35.2 lb. in weight.
bowl	Unit of volume. One bowl of husked rice equals 1.5 kg. / 3.4 lb.
column	Combination of army companies assembled for operations
company	Military unit of approx. 100 soldiers but most in SPDC are under-strength
kyat	Burmese currency; US \$1 equals 5.8 kyat at official rate, approx. 1,260 kyat at current market rate
<i>loh ah pay</i>	A Burmese term now commonly used in reference to forced labour; although traditionally refers to voluntary service for temples or the local community, not military or State projects
naw	S'Gkaw Karen prefix for women
paddy	Rice grain still in the husk
rice	Rice grain after pounding or milling, ready to cook
saw	S'Gkaw Karen prefix for men
<i>set tha</i>	A Burmese term for forced labour duty as a 'messenger' at army camps, but also involves errand-running and other tasks when no messages are in need of delivery.
village	An administrative unit of 5-20 villages in a local area, often centred around a
tract	large village
viss	Unit of weight measure; one viss equals 1.6 kg. / 3.6 lb.

Notes on the text

This report is based primarily upon situation updates written by several different KHRG field researchers working in Nyaunglebin District and is supplemented with the direct testimonies of villagers interviewed between August 2006 and May 2008. All names of people interviewed for this report and their home villages have been censored to protect them from retaliation.

All KHRG reports use district and township borders as defined by the KNU and many local villagers. These do not correspond to the 'official' SPDC-defined townships that are represented on most maps. Under SPDC designations, sections of western Nyaunglebin and Toungoo Districts fall within eastern Pegu (Bago) Division, while western Thaton and Doooplaya Districts form part of Mon State. Kyauk Kyi and Shwegyin townships – which the SPDC locate in Pegu Division – roughly correspond to Kyauk Kyi, Shwegyin and Mone townships of Nyaunglebin District on KHRG's maps of Karen State.

Many of the place names mentioned in this report are indicated on the accompanying maps. Most townships, villages and rivers have both a Karen and a Burmese name. KHRG has in most cases used Karen language names for villages but Burmese-language names for districts. Karen and Burmese names and terms transliterated into English follow KHRG standards and may deviate from those used by other organisations (as no convention has been universally adopted).

Villagers, particularly those in the hills, often do not keep track of dates and ages and, as a result, sometimes different people give different dates for an event or different ages for the people involved. Whenever possible, KHRG has attempted to establish and indicate the most accurate dates and ages. Villagers sometimes mention 'last year'; this often means the time before the latest (June-October) rainy season, rather than the previous calendar year. Similarly, villagers often refer to 'yesterday' or 'last month' to denote an event that occurred recently.

I. Introduction and executive summary

"I came here [to a refugee camp in Thailand] with my brother S--- because I had to do forced labour and, instead of getting wages, we had to pay set amounts to the SPDC and the villagers had to move all the time. They [SPDC soldiers] burnt down my village and forced the villagers to relocate to Mu Theh relocation site. Sometimes the children had to do forced labour when their parents weren't free."

- Saw D--- (male, 17), A--- village, Mone township (May 2008)

Situated in north-western Karen State, Nyaunglebin District is comprised mostly of forested mountains in the east which descend into low-lying plains along its western flank (abutting Pegu Division).¹ Villagers across Nyaunglebin District (Kler Lwee Htoo in Karen) have long been subject to a variety of abuses by army personnel. Nyaunglebin District consists of three townships – Mone, Kyauk Kyi and Shwegyin (Mu, Ler Doh and Hsaw Tee in Karen). Though the district has had a heavy Burma Army presence for many years, sustained military occupation has mostly been limited to areas alongside vehicle roads and in the plains. However, over the past three years the SPDC has been increasing its military presence in Nyaunglebin District as part of its broader northern Karen State offensive against the civilian population. Major components of this offensive have been the deployment of more troops and the establishment of new bases throughout the district.

In conjunction with the ongoing expansion of Burma Army operations in Nyaunglebin District, SPDC personnel have been forcibly relocating disparate communities from the forested mountains to sites which are closer to military-controlled vehicle roads and army camps in the plains. This forced relocation campaign has been a central facet of the offensive during the past three years. Through forced relocation, the Burma Army has aimed to depopulate the hills of Nyaunglebin District and bring all villagers under SPDC control. However, many villagers have been unwilling to comply with forced relocation orders. The Burma Army, in turn, has deemed those who resist relocation to be legitimate military targets.

The SPDC has used tactics of intimidation and violence to enforce compliance with relocation orders. These tactics include: attacks on villages, with widespread destruction of homes, farm fields and plantations; the confiscation of food and livestock; a shoot-on-sight policy targeting civilians and opposition soldiers alike; restrictions on movement out of and within non-SPDC-controlled areas; and the deployment of landmines in civilian areas. While many villagers have been able to flee into the forests in an attempt to evade military attacks and relocation orders, others have chosen to accept relocation, often hoping to be able to return to their homes at a later date. Figures from the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC)'s annual surveys on internal displacement in eastern Burma (indicated in the table below), show a marked increase in the number of civilians residing in both SPDC-controlled relocation sites and non-SPDC-controlled hiding sites in Kyauk Kyi and

¹ The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) demarcates large areas of Nyaunglebin District as part of Pegu Division within its official maps of the region.

Shwegyin townships since 2004.² While population totals have increased over this period as a whole, yearly figures by township show that numbers have on some occasions decreased in some areas. These occasional decreases in civilian populations likely reflect the fact that many of these individuals have fled from relocation sites to hiding sites, refugee camps or elsewhere; negotiated with local SPDC authorities for permission to return to their former villages; were forced out of hiding and into relocation sites or other SPDC-controlled settlements; or left hiding sites in Nyaunglebin District to reach hiding sites elsewhere in Karen State or refugee camps in Thailand.

Displaced civilians in Nyaunglebin District (2004-2008)

		2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Relocation sites	Kyauk Kyi	9,300	6,000	6,400	10,600	20,000
	Shwegyin	4,200	1,900	0	1,600	800
	Total	13,500	7,900	6,400	12,200	20,800
Hiding sites	Kyauk Kyi	1,300	9,000	10,200	10,000	12,000
	Shwegyin	2,000	4,400	6,000	8,700	9,000
	Total	3,300	13,400	16,200	18,700	21,000

Although the SPDC's relocation campaign has re-intensified over the past three years, it began much earlier than the current offensive. Relocation sites have, therefore, had to expand as new communities are forced to join those who were previously relocated. This has meant that the available housing plots and arable land – both already extremely limited – have diminished further, leaving the newest residents even worse off. Facilities are typically inadequate, especially when villagers first arrive at the relocation sites. Imposing stringent movement restrictions, local SPDC forces have been more easily able to exploit the residents of these sites as a source of labour, food, funds and other supplies. Relocated villagers are subject to a variety of exploitative abuses, including forced labour, arbitrary taxation, extortion and looting, as well as arbitrary arrest, detention and violent abuses often employed as a means to enforce compliance with demands. These combined abuses cut into villagers' limited financial savings, food supplies and labour time, leading to livelihoods vulnerability, increased poverty, malnutrition and ill health.

Facing persistent exploitative demands and their deleterious consequences, relocated villagers have employed a variety of strategies to resist abuse. In some cases, such resistance has involved flight into displacement at hiding sites within Nyaunglebin District or elsewhere in Karen State, urban areas inside Burma, refugee camps in Thailand or migrant worker communities abroad. In other cases, relocated villagers have been able to negotiate with the local SPDC commander for permission to return to their former villages. In negotiation efforts, villagers have cited the dire humanitarian conditions and lack of arable land at relocation sites as reasons for needing to return to former homes. Often, however, such negotiation is not possible

² Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) (following official State maps) includes Kyauk Kyi and Shwegyin townships within Pegu Division. This area corresponds roughly to all three townships of Nyaunglebin District as defined in KHRG maps and this report. Population data included here are taken from TBBC's annual reports on internal displacement in eastern Burma, available on their website at <http://www.tbtc.org/>.

or not effective. In these cases, those who nevertheless choose to return to their former villages or fields risk being shot on sight by patrolling troops. Those who flee to hiding sites face an ongoing threat of attack as the Burma Army continues its efforts to depopulate the hills and force all civilians to relocate into military-controlled areas. Repeated military attacks and forced relocation efforts, in combination with villagers' flight and evasion (whether during a military attack or post-relocation), have developed into continuous cycles of displacement.



This photo shows the entrance gate at Htaik Htoo (Bplaw Law Bler) relocation site in Kyauk Kyi township on March 16th 2007. The signboard above the entrance reads: “Warm welcome to Htaik Htoo area.” *[Photo: KHRG]*

II. SPDC military operations in Nyaunglebin District

"We arrived here [at an Internally Displaced Person (IDP) hiding site in Nyaunglebin District] on the first of December [2007]. SPDC soldiers attacked our village, so we had to come here. One villager died when the army attacked our village. The child [who died] was just 17 years old."

- Naw P--- (female, 45), Ny--- village, Mone township (April 2008)

Burma Army troops have intensified military operations in Nyaunglebin District since the start of the current offensive in northern Karen State. Army battalions have regularly rotated between older and more newly established army camps. The construction and expansion of roads throughout the area have facilitated this troop deployment and rotation, as well as the construction of new army camps.

According to KHRG field researchers operating in the area, SPDC military units active in Nyaunglebin District during 2008 included battalions serving under Military Operations Command (MOC) #21 and Light Infantry Division (LID) #101. MOC #21 controls Light Infantry Battalions (LIB) #320, 381, 438, 681 and 682 and Infantry Battalions (IB) #47, 56, 223, 237 and 276. In April and May 2008, Burma Army troops expanded into the area of T'Gkaw Der village of Kheh Der village tract, in the Thaw Ngeh Der area of Mone Township. Soldiers from LIB #276 of MOC #21 entered the area of T'Gkaw Der village and set up a new camp on April 5th 2008. Following this, troops from LIBs #253, 257 and 335, of Tactical Operation Command (TOC) #2 and LID #101, also arrived in the area of T'Gkaw Der village and established a camp on April 11th 2008. Burma Army battalions that are permanently based in the area, according to TBBC, include: IB #57 and LIBs #349, 350 and 589 in SPDC-defined Shwegyin township and IB #60 and LIBs #223, 253, 320, 351, 590, 599, 601 and 602 in SPDC-defined Kyauk Kyi township.³

Utilising its position at army camps and bases along the roadways of Nyaunglebin District, the Burma Army has dispatched patrols into the surrounding mountains in an attempt to flush out a civilian population that continues to evade the military. These civilians have been deemed enemies of the State – and thus legitimate military targets – and army patrols have sought out and attacked villagers attempting to evade military control and forced relocation. This increased military presence has meant an increased risk of violent attack and village destruction for civilians attempting to reside outside of military control. Thus, high numbers of villagers remain on the move throughout the mountains in order to evade SPDC patrols.

For example, prior to the arrival of LIBs #276, 253, 257 and 335 in April 2008, residents of both T'Gkaw Der village and nearby Thaw Ngeh Der village received information about the imminent attacks and were able to flee before the soldiers arrived. Some of these villagers had prepared hidden food stores in the forest in expectation of having to flee. Subsequently, on May 10th 2008, Burma Army troops from MOC #21 attacked and burned down 11 homes as well as villagers' personal

³ TBBC, *Internal Displacement and International Law in Eastern Burma*, October 2008. p. 60.

belongings at Meh Lay Kee village, which is located in the area of T'Gkaw Der village.



Burma Army soldiers of LIB #350 patrolling in the plains of Nyaunglebin District in early 2008. *[Photo: KHRG]*

III. Forced relocation

The SPDC has long employed the practice of forced relocation as a central facet of its military operations in Karen State. In Nyaunglebin District, as with other parts of Karen State, forced relocation has served to depopulate difficult-to-control hill areas and consolidate the entire civilian population in the plains – areas which are much easier to control. Relocation sites are typically located around army camps and bases or along SPDC-controlled vehicle roads. The forced relocation process has involved 1) issuing relocation orders to relevant communities and 2) conducting military attacks against those who do not comply with these orders.

"We were forced to relocate by [SPDC] LIB #439. They threatened us that if we didn't move from our place, they would burn down our village and houses. When we were at the new site, we faced problems, such as people getting sick and the limited space that was available for us. We didn't have an open area to keep our animals... Now, nobody stays in our old village, so when the soldiers [of LIB #439] arrived there [to the abandoned village following the relocation], they stole all of our chickens and vegetables."

- Ko M--- (male, 44), D--- village, Kyauk Kyi township (March 2007)

There have been many relocation sites established in Nyaunglebin District. In some cases, relocation sites have only existed temporarily as villagers have gradually trickled back to their former homes. Such a return may be possible where SPDC authorities are no longer regularly monitoring the relocation site or alternatively where residents negotiate with local SPDC authorities (often on humanitarian grounds) for permission to return to their former villages. Some relocation sites have been newly established to house relocated villagers. Other sites have been appended to pre-existing villages and towns with their own indigenous populations. Currently, the major relocation sites in Nyaunglebin District include: Muh Theh, Tha Bpyay Nyunt and Htaik Htoo (Bplaw Law Bler).⁴

In some cases, individual villages have been targeted for relocation. In other cases, large areas (sometimes whole village tracts) containing numerous villages have been targeted for mass relocation. In 2007, for example, SPDC authorities in Nyaunglebin District embarked on a large-scale relocation programme focused primarily on Kyauk Kyi township but also including some villages located across the Mone township border. This relocation programme included many villages scattered across numerous village tracts (including Kho Bpu, Thoo Gk'Bee, Bpay Dtoo, Noh Poh, Bp'Deh Gkaw and Hsaw Mee Loo). Some of the individual incidents of relocations involved in this programme are described below.

The Kyauk Kyi relocation programme began at the start of 2007 with SPDC authorities forcibly removing the residents of at least Weh Lah Dtaw, Pa Hta La, Dtaw Koh, Hee Poh Der and Htaik Bpauk villages and ordering some of them to relocate to

⁴ Bplaw Law Bler is the local Karen language name for Htaik Htoo. The rest of this report, therefore, uses the name Bplaw Law Bler in reference to this relocation site. On some maps, Tha Bpyay Nyunt is located in southern Toungoo District.

the Gkya Thay Dtaw relocation site and others to a section of the Bplaw Law Bler relocation site.



The remains of dismantled buildings at Htaik Bpauk village, Kyauk Kyi township, as seen on March 17th 2007. When the SPDC forcibly relocated the village in early 2007, local residents had to dismantle buildings and salvage building supplies for the construction of new homes and other structures in the military-controlled relocation site to which they were sent.



On June 15th 2007, deputy battalion commander Yan Naing of SPDC LIB #599 ordered the residents of Hsa Leh and Bpay Dtoo villages to relocate to Shwe Bpaung Kan.

Between May and August 2007, SPDC LIB #350, under battalion commander Aung Zaw, and LIB #590, under the command of Kyaw Thoo Rah Win, issued conflicting forced relocation orders to the residents of five villages in Thoo Gk'Bee village tract, Kyauk Kyi township. (These conflicting orders illustrate the often capricious character of the local enforcement of military policy.) On May 29th, as part of this forced relocation push, SPDC LIB #350 company commander Thet Naing Aung ordered the villagers of Bp'Nah Ner village to relocate. Instead, however, the villagers evaded forced relocation and fled to other non-SPDC-controlled villages in Nyaunglebin District.

On June 20th 2007, Thet Naing Aung evicted the residents of Thoo Gk'Bee, Noh Poh, Mah Taw Gkoo and Taw Loo Koh villages. However, in this case Thet Naing Aung did not indicate any particular relocation site. The villagers were left to find other new villages on their own. Some of the villagers stayed with friends and relatives in other villages and some stayed in farm field huts located in nearby agricultural fields. Some villagers were only able to obtain shelter beneath others peoples' homes. The evicted villagers were, furthermore, not able to dismantle their houses in order to take building materials with them or take all of their food supplies when they left. As a consequence, they faced severe food shortages immediately following their eviction. At the time when the SPDC soldiers forced the villagers out of their villages, one of the soldiers heading the evictions reportedly told the villagers that *"you can go wherever you want. I don't want to see any of your faces."* All together, there were five villages (Bp'Nah Ner, Thoo Gk'Bee, Noh Poh, Mah Taw Gkoo and Taw Loo Koh) comprised of 125 households that were forcibly evicted.

As some of the evicted residents of Thoo Gk'Bee, Noh Poh, Mah Taw Gkoo and Taw Loo Koh villages were sheltering in their farm field huts, Aung Zaw of SPDC LIB #350 ordered these villagers to dismantle their huts on July 18th 2007. And, as the villagers were in the process of departing, soldiers from SPDC LIB #350 burnt down 50 of the huts. The soldiers also burnt two boats, one bullock and 200,000 kyat (approx. US \$158.73) belonging to Saw P---, as well as some of the villagers' farming equipment. Villagers tried to quickly salvage building materials from their homes before soldiers set fire to the huts.

On July 19th 2007, SPDC LIB #590 replaced LIB #350 in Thoo Gk'Bee village tract. As soon as LIB #590 company commander Min Thoo Kah arrived, he informed previously relocated residents of Thoo Gk'Bee, Noh Poh, Mah Taw Gkoo and Taw Loo Koh villages that they could return to their former homes if they agreed to pay 5,000 kyat (approx. US \$3.97). If these villagers wanted permission to access and tend their farm fields (located outside of the village proper), they would have to pay 4,000 kyat (approx. US \$3.17) per month per household. On August 28th 2007, after the residents of these five villages had returned to their former homes, battalion commander Kyaw Thoo Rah Win of SPDC LIB #590 ordered them to relocate once again and to dismantle all of their houses and farm field huts. Some of the residents

were sent to Bplaw Law Bler relocation site and others were sent to the Yan Myo Aung area.



Bplaw Law Bler relocation site as seen in March 2007. *[Photos: KHRG]*



The experiences of relocated villagers from Thoo Gk'Bee village tract illustrate the often contradictory practices of local army units and the instability forced upon local residents. Whether or not a given military official enforces relocation orders depends in part on whether he feels that he can maintain control over a given community and what benefits (financial or otherwise) he can extract from villagers. Occasionally, enforcement of relocation orders also depends on the sustainability of a given relocation site and the success of villagers' efforts to negotiate for permission to remain in their home villages.

Forced relocation orders are typically accompanied by threats that anyone who fails to move by the prescribed date will be shot on sight and/or have their homes and fields burnt down. In some cases, relocation orders detail services like medical clinics and schools that are said to be available to villagers at their respective relocation site. Villagers are given anywhere from a day to a few weeks to relocate.

In cases when villagers are given more time, they may try to take apart their homes so that the building materials can be used for the construction of a new house at the relocation site. However, local SPDC authorities do not provide any means of transporting supplies to these sites.

As an example, on August 2nd 2007, SPDC IB #57, under the control of commander Yeh Htun Oo, ordered villagers from Gkaw Tha Say village in Bp'Deh Gkaw village tract of Kyauk Kyi township to relocate to Bp'Deh Gkaw village within a single day. As the local residents possessed no bullock carts on which to transport their possessions, they had to carry these supplies on foot. Furthermore, the rainy season was well underway and so the villagers had to make this trek in the rain and mud. The relocation site was three miles from their village.

All our children had to carry things...

"The SPDC relocated us to Bp'Deh Gkaw village. It's three miles from our village... The SPDC [army unit] who first made us relocate during the dry season was [LIB] #349. The second time it was [IB] #57. I only know the name of the officer from [IB] #57. It was Yeh Htun Oo. At first I lived in Hsaw Htee [Shwegyin township] and, when the SPDC moved us, we came to live in Gkaw Tha Say village during this past hot season. Then [IB] #57 moved us to Bp'Deh Gkaw [village] on August 2nd 2007.

There were a lot of problems and difficulties facing us [during the relocation process]. Those who had carts were in a better situation because they could carry their things on the carts. But those who didn't have carts, like me, had to carry things on their shoulders in the rain. All our children had to carry things. If they could carry one bag, we asked them to carry one bag and if they could carry one small package, we gave them one. None of us or any of our children had time to take a rest. We had to carry things in the rain throughout the day. They asked us to take away all of our property within a single day and the next day they wouldn't let us return to our village. So, on the second day, we had no houses in which to stay [at the relocation site] and we had to

stay under other villagers' houses on the ground and it was among the shit [sic] of pigs and chickens. Then our children became ill."

- Saw S--- (male, 55), Gk--- village, Kyauk Kyi township (Sept 2007)

In response to forced relocation orders, some communities have tried to negotiate with local SPDC officers in order to gain permission to stay in their own villages without being attacked. In some cases, such negotiation has involved claims by village leaders that, because their culture and means of livelihood are tied to the hills, they will not be able to effectively adapt to life in the plains. Village leaders may also attempt to assure local SPDC officials that their communities will comply with military demands in return for freedom from forced relocation and military attacks. Alternatively, some communities have attempted to bribe local SPDC officials in order to avoid forced relocation. However, such negotiation is not always successful.

"Our village head tried once [to gain permission] to be able to stay in the village and he collected money from the villagers [to pay the local SPDC official]. From some he collected 1,000 kyat (approx US \$0.79) and from some 500 kyat (approx. US \$0.40). But it wasn't successful and we still had to move."

- Saw S--- (male, 55), Gk--- village, Kyauk Kyi township (Sept 2007)

In addition to forcing villagers to move to sites especially established for relocation, SPDC battalions have also forced villagers to relocate to pre-existing villages already under military control – places where villagers are expected to share space, facilities, agricultural land and even houses. For example, during the rainy season of 2006, LIB #599 deputy commander Yan Naing forced Gkoh Nee village in Mone township to relocate to a site located in the midst of paddy fields belonging to villagers in eastern Noh Nyah Lah village. This presumably means that at least some of these paddy fields were destroyed. The relocated villagers were forced to create a new 'village' (or more precisely, a new annex to the pre-existing village) on the paddy fields. In August 2006, the relocated villagers were forced to build a fence around the new site. They were not given any bamboo or wood and so had to purchase these supplies elsewhere at a cost of 30 kyat per bamboo pole.

"The villagers had to move to a relocation site that had been prepared for them. They [local SDPC authorities] gave the villagers just a week to finish relocating their households. Now there are 16 households that have already relocated. They [SPDC authorities] told us that if fighting [with the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)] occurred in the village, it would be difficult for them [SPDC soldiers] to fire their guns because it would injure the villagers. So they ordered the villagers to relocate. When they came and ordered us to move our place, we had to serve them food. It was kind of a problem for us to collect money from the villagers and pay for the cost of the food. The commander of LIB #599 is named Kyaw Zya Lin and the battalion's Sergeant Major is named Yeh Min. As for LIB #60, it's led by Aye Ko with five assistants who help him... [The community of] Aung Soe Moe village has been relocated to another village since the hot season. It's so crowded at that

village and, in the hot season, they [the relocated and other villagers] face problems such as a lack of water."

- Saw M--- (male, 26), G--- village, Kyauk Kyi township (Aug 2008)

Aside from the process of forced relocation itself, and the accompanying loss of homes, agricultural fields and other forms of livelihood, relocated villagers face heavy movement restrictions and a host of abuses by local army units operating in and around the relocation site. The situation of abuse at SPDC-controlled relocation sites, as well as the general conditions of these sites, is examined in more detail in the following chapter. A table with some cases of forced relocation described in this report is presented below:

Date	Relocated communities	Township	Relocation sites	SPDC unit	SPDC officer
Rainy season 2006	Gkoh Nee village	Mone	Eastern Noh Nyah Lah village	LIB #599	Yan Naing (deputy battalion commander)
Early 2007	Weh Lah Dtaw village	Kyauk Kyi	Gkya Thay Dtaw and Blaw Law Bpler		
	Pa Hta La village				
	Dtaw Koh village				
	Hee Poh Der village				
	Htaik Bpauk village				
January 7 th 2007	Kho Bpu village tract	Mone	Near Kyauk Kyi town	SOC #2	Khin Maung Oo
	Hsaw Mee Loo village tract			IB #60	Zaw Linn
	Aung Soe Moe village			LIB #351	Chit Than Oo
February 11 th 2007	Bpay Dtoo village	Mone	Hsa Leh village	LIB #599	Khin Maung Myint (commander)
May 29 th 2007	Bp’Nah Ner village	Kyauk Kyi	N/A	LIB #350	Thet Naing Aung (company commander)
June 15 th 2007	Has Leh village	Kyauk Kyi	Shwe Bpaung Kan	LIB #599	Yan Naing (deputy battalion commander)
	Bpay Dtoo village				
June 20 th 2007	Thoo Gk’Bee village	Kyauk Kyi	N/A	LIB #350	Thet Naing Aung (company commander)
	Noh Poh village				
	Mah Taw Gkoo village				
	Taw Loo Koh village				
July 19 th 2007	Thoo Gk’Bee villagers	Kyauk Kyi	Previously relocated villagers are allowed to return home	LIB #590	Min Thoo Kah (company commander)
	Noh Poh villagers				
	Mah Taw Gkoo villagers				
	Taw Loo Koh villagers				
August 2 nd 2007	Gkaw Tha Say village	Kyauk Kyi	Bp’Deh Gkaw village	IB #57	Yeh Htun Oo (commander)
	Bp’Deh Gkaw village tract				
August 28 th 2007	Thoo Gk’Bee village	Kyauk Kyi	Bplaw Law Bler and Yan Myo Aung area	LIB #590	Kyaw Thoo Rah Win (battalion commander)
	Noh Poh village				
	Mah Taw Gkoo village				
	Taw Loo Koh village				
September 17 th 2008	Noh Poh village tract	Kyauk Kyi	N/A		Soe Than (based at Ler Doh)

IV. Conditions at SPDC-controlled relocation sites

"The SPDC came to our village and forced us to relocate to Tha Bpyay Nyunt. We've faced a big problem for our survival: we don't have any land to do our work here. Also, we dare not to go back to work at our homeland. We moved two years ago. Another issue is that they [SPDC authorities] always order us to do loh ah pay⁵ such as clearing [the sides of vehicle] roads and carrying their rations. The orders have come from LIB #320. It [LIB #320] is based at Tha Bpyay Nyunt and the commander's name is Soe Win. We've had to carry their rations from Tha Bpyay Nyunt to Gk'Moo Loh. They also ordered two people from each village to serve as set tha⁶ for three days... Now we don't have time to do our own work. We must always be wary of the SPDC Army soldiers. Nobody dares oppose them. When we moved to the relocation site, they gave each household an area of 30 feet by 50 feet [9.14 m by 15.24 m]. The space is very small for us, but we can't do anything about it."

- Saw Bp--- (male, 41), Gk--- village, Mone township (April 2008)

Once relocated, villagers are provided with little-to-no land, food or other support. A single household may be allotted a small plot of land on which they must fit their new home and possibly a small garden. These small plots are typically insufficient to fit larger livestock like cattle, which may, therefore, have to be left behind at abandoned villages. Furthermore, some instances of relocation have taken place before villagers are able to harvest their crops. Likewise fruit, betel nut or other plantations which have taken years to mature must be left behind. Even if sufficient land were available, re-establishing such plantations soon enough to ensure livelihood continuity is simply impossible. Food insecurity is thus exacerbated by forced relocation.

Before, we could do our work peacefully...

"Before, we could do our work peacefully. But now, because of the operations of our enemies [SPDC soldiers], we can't do our work anymore. The SPDC soldiers came and forced us to relocate. The first time they drove us out [of our village] was in April [2006]. We moved away for one month and then came back to the village. The first time they didn't come to force us [to relocate] themselves, but summoned the village head and talked to him about it. This [second] time they came by themselves and drove us out. They entered the village and forced us to move, telling us to do so 'without fail.' They became fierce and harassing.

The villagers tried to explain to them that it was the period to harvest durian and other fruits, but we couldn't stop them and we had to leave the village.

⁵ *Loh ah pay*; a Burmese term now commonly used in reference to forced labour, although traditionally referring to voluntary service for temples or the local community, not military or State projects.

⁶ A Burmese term for forced labour duty as a 'messenger' at army camps, but also involves errand-running and other tasks.

The place to which we had to relocate was Tha Bpyay Nyunt and now we're staying in other people's houses. Mostly, when we stayed in our village, we cultivated betel nut and durian plantations, but after we were relocated to the new village, we couldn't do anything. The SPDC doesn't provide any rations for us... They don't give us any medicine when we are sick. Even for food, they don't look after us... We aren't allowed to go back to the village. Our lands and plantations are all now lost because we haven't been able to return to collect the durian or betel nut... The villagers are faced with food shortages and it's painful for the villagers to be away from their homes."

- Saw K--- (male, 30), Y---village, Mone township (Aug 2006)

As another example of the relationship between food insecurity and forced relocation, on January 7th 2007, commanders Khin Maung Oo, Zaw Linn and Chit Than Oo, of Strategic Operations Command #2, IB #60 and LIB #351, respectively, ordered villages in Kho Bpoo and Hsaw Mee Loo village tracts, as well as Aung Soe Moe village, to dismantle their houses and move to a relocation site near Kyauk Kyi town. The village elders tried to convince the commanders not to move the village because of the problems it would cause the villagers. However, the commanders would not consent to their request. The villagers were not given any rations at the new site and could only carry a small amount of food with them from their former village. Furthermore, no arable land was provided at the relocation site and other villagers who were already living in the area around Kyauk Kyi had themselves been previously struggling to grow or obtain enough food.

In a similar situation, SPDC LIB #599 commander Khin Maung Myint ordered the residents of Bpay Dtoo village in Mone township to relocate to Hsa Leh village on February 11th 2007. The villagers were forced to dismantle their houses and leave all of their land and livestock behind. The area to which they were sent had insufficient land for cultivation. The villagers were, therefore, faced with a serious food shortage when they arrived.

On the small plots of land allocated to new arrivals at relocation sites, some villagers are able to construct houses using materials salvaged from their abandoned homes. Relocated villagers without such materials may have to shelter temporarily with previously relocated villagers (in some cases, beneath their houses). Following relocation, some villagers have been able to sneak back to their former villages in order to collect materials for the construction of new homes at relocation sites.

"To be able to [build and] stay in a house of our own, we went back secretly to our [abandoned] village. When there were no soldiers patrolling in the village, we went back into the village and tried to break up our [abandoned] house and take the roofing material. I called all of my children to accompany me. If they could carry three thatch shingles, then I gave them three shingles to carry and if they could carry five, then I gave them five. It took us three or four days and we were able to build a small hut and until now I've stayed in that hut."

- Saw S--- (male, 55), Gk--- village, Kyauk Kyi township (Sept 2007)

Movement restrictions

"They [SPDC authorities] didn't allow us to return to our homes and check on our plantations. Therefore, we didn't have time to do our own work anymore. Some of our durian plants and betel nut plants died because they didn't get enough water."

- Saw Bp--- (male), Y--- village, Mone Township (April 2008)

In order to prevent the flight of relocated villagers, local SPDC authorities impose stringent movement restrictions at relocation sites. These restrictions often entail the forced construction of perimeter fences around relocation sites. For example, in August 2006, deputy battalion commander Yan Aung and company commander Min Thant Lwin of SPDC LIB #599 ordered all villages in the area of Mone township under their control to fence themselves in by building perimeter fencing (in some cases two parallel fences) all the way around their villages with only one or two entrances/exits. In some villages, everyone – including women, children and elderly villagers up to 80 years old – had to participate in order to complete the construction on time. At the time of the order, the rains had been heavy and many of the villages were flooded, forcing villagers to work in and under the water.



Residents of Dta Koh Bpwa village in Mone township construct two perimeter fences around their flooded village in August 2006 as ordered by SPDC LIB #599. All of the villagers – men, women and children – worked on the fence to get it finished as quickly as possible. [Photo: KHRG]

"...We were also forced to enclose the village by the end of this month. The fence has created problems for us because it's no longer easy for us to go to search for food and we also had to buy the bamboo [to construct the fence] at

a cost of 25 kyat for each pole... The soldiers forced us to enclose the village without fail. They said that if we didn't do it, they'd fine us and cause trouble for us... They said that, after we finished enclosing the village, they would come and take photos of it. It was not only my village which was forced to do this, but all the villages in the area."

- Saw K--- (male, 34), W--- village, Mone township (Aug 2006)

As villagers are often forced to serve as sentries – monitoring all arrivals and departures at their village – it is possible that the purpose of double-row fencing is to allow these sentries to patrol the village perimeters between the two fences. In Dt'Kaw Bpwah village, SPDC LIB #599 also forced villagers to construct high watch towers in August 2006, so that villagers could be seen leaving from any of the village's exit paths. Regardless of the reasoning, these double fences increasingly hinder and restrict villagers' freedom of movement.

"Now they are forcing us to enclose our village [with fences]. They told us to finish enclosing it within three days, but we don't have the bamboo and wood we need. So the villagers are in trouble. They told us to enclose the village in two rows. It is so difficult for the villagers to go out to cut the bamboo and the villagers are stressed. It's the rainy season now, so the cart road is unavailable for travelling. So the villagers have to cut down all the trees we have in the village and use all the wood and bamboo that they have underneath their houses. We have to use what we have in the village because they told us to finish it within three days. We don't have time to wait until the cart road is available again."

- Saw D--- (male, 53), Dt---village, Mone township (Aug 2006)

Perimeter fences are one method of many that is used to restrict villager movement. Other methods include: prohibitions for civilians that prevent their return to their former villages, restrictions on travelling to neighbouring villages and towns and forbidding villagers to remain in agricultural fields at night.⁷

"Most of the villagers work in their flat fields and hill fields. We've been hindered in carrying out our work. We can't construct field huts for ourselves and we have to travel to our fields and back [in the same day]. It's become a problem for us. When we work in the field, we don't have huts to rest and eat in. We have to eat under the bushes. The enemies [SPDC soldiers] haven't allowed us to construct field huts. They've said that they'll 'shoot-to-kill' anyone they see constructing one. The villagers have also been forced to dismantle the huts that they'd previously constructed."

- Saw H--- (male, 30), W---village, Mone township (Aug 2006)

⁷ Villagers traditionally stay outside of their villages at huts in their farm fields for several days at a time during intensive periods in the crop cycle. But, as farm fields are often located far from the village proper, it is difficult and time-consuming for villagers to travel back and forth each day. By sleeping out at farm huts, villagers are able to maximise time available for working on their fields and can also keep wild animals away from their crops.

While travel further than adjacent agricultural fields at relocation sites has been heavily restricted, relocated villagers have in some cases been able to purchase temporary travel passes that allow them to return to tend their fields or travel to neighbouring towns in order to trade. These documents typically cost between 500 to 1,000 kyat (approx. US \$0.40 to 0.79). In some cases, villagers may need these documents simply to access the agricultural fields around their relocation site during the day. The process of continually requesting and purchasing such travel permission documents is both tedious and costly.

Not only is it arduous to apply for travel permission documents, but the decision of whether to issue these documents is left to the whim of local military officers. Firstly, villagers must go to their village head to get her or him to prepare a travel document in their name. Village heads are expected to cover the costs of the paper for these documents themselves, so villagers are often charged by the village head for this service. Secondly, villagers must obtain the signature of the relevant SPDC officer on their travel document. If the officer decides to withhold his signature, the villagers are not officially permitted to travel. And, even when villagers obtain such documents, they are typically only given permission to travel for one or two days at a time. Villagers must repeat this entire process whenever they wish to travel.

"This year, we haven't been able to freely travel to do our work. We've only been able to travel with their [SPDC authorities'] permission. If they don't give us permission, we can't travel. The SPDC soldiers are based near my village... along the route we usually travel to go to our hill fields. So it's been impossible for us to travel as we choose [i.e. without SPDC authorisation]... This is really a very big problem. It's difficult for some people to get food everyday. Even people who usually have plenty of food are suffering, not to mention ordinary working people. If you can't travel, you have nothing to eat... We're just villagers... We're people who work in the morning and eat at noon... They [SPDC] don't trust us, so they don't allow us to travel and it's become a big problem for us. We're keeping our hearts calm and staying here, but it's causing us trouble and we can't get anything to eat."

- Naw L--- (female, 37), M--- village, Mone township (Aug 2006)

These restrictions on movement, in combination with insufficient land provisions at relocation sites, contribute to increased food insecurity as relocated villagers are hindered from effectively tending to their crops. To address this concern, many relocated villagers have snuck out of their relocation site – evading movement restrictions – simply to cultivate farm fields at their former villages or access other sources of food or trade goods.

"They didn't provide food and rice and such things. They didn't even give us the right to go back and work in our fields. We had to go back secretly without them noticing. We couldn't go and work in other villagers' fields for wages because by the time we'd get there it would already be noon. So people don't want to call us to work on their fields."

- Saw S--- (male, 55), Gk--- village, Kyauk Kyi township (Sept 2007)

Covert efforts to access agricultural fields, plantations, other food stuffs or cattle at former villages can provide some relief for food insecurity concerns. However, local SPDC authorities have taken additional measures to prevent villagers from returning to their abandoned villages. These measures include forcing villagers to dismantle their homes and farm field huts prior to relocation. In one incident on September 17th 2008, SPDC operation commander Soe Than, based in Kyauk Kyi town, evicted villagers living in Noh Poh village tract and ordered them to relocate to the plains. Soe Than ordered all those who were working on hill fields for their livelihoods to destroy their farm huts prior to relocation.

In some cases, soldiers have burnt down homes and farm field huts and/or planted landmines in and around abandoned villages and farm fields in order to prevent the return of forcibly relocated villagers. For example, on June 15th 2007, SPDC LIB #599 deputy battalion commander Yan Naing forced the residents of Hsa Leh village to move to Shwe Bpaung Kan. Yan Naing allowed the villagers just three days to complete the relocation. After the villagers had moved, Yan Naing had his soldiers plant landmines in the abandoned village and along the road the villagers had previously used in order to look for work.

Despite SPDC efforts to prevent any return to former homes and land, relocated communities have nevertheless persistently attempted to do just this, despite the risks. On July 2nd 2007, for example, 29-year-old Saw Kyaw Kyaw from Bpeh Koo Yah village stepped on an SPDC landmine when he went to collect dogfruit at Hsa Leh, his former village. Instead of giving the victim medical treatment, however, SPDC LIB #599 deputy battalion commander Yan Naing fined him 150,000 kyat (approx. US \$119.05) for revealing the location of the landmine on which he had stepped.

In another example, on August 26th 2008, a column of SPDC soldiers operating under MOC #21 arrested eleven relocated villagers in Hsaw Mee Loo village tract while they were returning to Khoh Bpoo, their former village, in order to collect betel leaves, betel nuts and durian to eat and sell. Those arrested were Naw Htoo Ler, Saw Heh Moo, Naw Thaw Paw, Naw Ler Wah, Naw Gkay Lay, Naw Hser Htoo, Naw Htee Wah, Saw Nyaw Heh, Saw Chyo Phyo, Saw Gkyi Win and Saw Maung Doh. These villagers had returned to their former village because there had not been sufficient agricultural land available at the site to which they had been relocated. Since the time of their arrest, KHRG has not received any news of their release.

Villagers have also been threatened with violence if they flout movement restrictions. For example, locally-based soldiers from MOC #16 threatened residents of Ma La Daw village⁸ in 2006, that they would be shot on sight if they left their village and met with outsiders. In a separate incident on September 17th 2008, SPDC soldiers of LIB #10, led by Aung Aung Oo, banned villagers from venturing into the surrounding forest. Villagers were informed that if they were seen travelling to the forest, they would be shot.

⁸ The SPDC uses the name Ma La Daw in reference to the three villages of Ma La Daw, Dter Kweh Lay Koh and Maw Koh combined.

When villagers travel outside the confines of relocation sites to trade or tend crops and livestock, there is always a chance that they will encounter KNLA soldiers along the way or otherwise be falsely accused of contacting the KNLA. As SPDC forces have stated that they will punish villagers for such encounters, some villagers have expressed anxiety about going to their plantations and crop fields.

"My village is next to an SPDC army camp and the KNLA soldiers are also not very far from our village. Sometimes the KNLA soldiers have travelled around and met us at our plantations. They [the KNLA soldiers] haven't done anything to us, but when the SPDC soldiers have found out, they've threatened the villagers that they'll torture them and the villagers have lived in fear because of this. Even though we haven't done anything wrong, the SPDC soldiers are always trying to find something to accuse us of."

- Naw L--- (female, 37), M---village, Mone township (Aug 2006)

When relocated villagers are unable to access plantations or agricultural fields either at their abandoned villages or around their relocation site, they have often sought out alternative ways to support their families. In some cases, villagers have been able to collect vegetables and other edible foods growing wild in the surrounding forest and sell them for cash or exchange them for rice and other food. Alternatively, some villagers have been able to find work as day labourers on farms.

"...We looked for taro [a type of edible plant] and if we tried very hard, we could get two or three viss [3.3 kg. / 7.2 lb. to 4.9 kg. / 10.8 lb.] in a day. We have to go a long way to find taro. We can sell one viss [1.6 kg. / 3.6 lb.] of taro for one thousand kyat [US \$0.79]. But the price of the rice is higher than we can get [from selling taro]. So we've faced many problems. We can't even think about treating our ailments. We just ignored the pain. People who have flat fields haven't been able to look after their land full-time. The crops have been destroyed by wild pigs and such. They also haven't been able to look after their cattle. The SPDC doesn't want us to sleep in our fields. We don't have permission to bring our cattle into the [relocation] site, so we've left our cattle in the old village and the children go back and feed them. In the evening time at 4:00 or 5:00 pm, all the children return to the [relocation] site."

- Saw Sh--- (male, 55), Gk--- village, Kyauk Kyi township (Sept 2007)

Forced Labour

"We must always work for the SPDC, such as by repairing the vehicle road. They gave the order to us [and the villagers went to do the forced labour] on March 14th 2008, and [the villagers finished the work and] came back on March 18th 2008. The order was from [SPDC] LIB #320. At that time there were 10 people who went for loh ah pay. When we constructed the road, the SPDC Army soldiers guarded us. They were worried that we'd escape. We had to do the road construction for the whole day. It went from 7:30 [am] to 5:00 [pm]. On another day, we had to do other things. They [SPDC soldiers] accused us of planting landmines, so we're [caught] between the two armed groups [SPDC and KNLA]. The commander's name is Soe Win. He led column #2. And the other two leaders were both younger than me. On the last day [of four days of

labour], they provided us with some food to eat... We started to do loh ah pay in March [and have continued] until April. They haven't given us anything for payment."

- Saw Gk--- (male, 42), M--- village, Mone township (April 2008)

Residents of SPDC-controlled relocation sites (as well as non-relocated residents of SPDC-controlled villages) continue to face a variety of forced labour demands. These demands include: providing bullock carts to carry army rations and supplies between army camps; portering army rations and supplies on foot; conducting agricultural work and livestock rearing; clearing forest overgrowth from alongside vehicle roads; constructing, repairing and resurfacing vehicle roads; constructing or repairing buildings at army camps; serving as sentries for SPDC army camps, as village security guards or as *set tha* (messengers); and fabricating and delivering building supplies.

As an example, in March 2008 Soe Win, commander of LIB #320, MOC #21, based at Tha Bpyay Nyunt relocation site, Mone township, forced the residents of Gk'Moo Loh, Ma La Daw and Maw Gkeh Tha Bper Koh villages to labour on the construction of a vehicle road from Tha Bpyay Nyunt to Buh Hsa Kee in southern Toungoo District.

On November 30th 2008, soldiers from SPDC LIB #599, led by Colonel Aung Ko Oo, forced 1,137 people from Bplaw Law Bler relocation site and Inak (Noh Thoo in Karen) village tract of Kyauk Kyi township to cut down and prepare bamboo and wood and then use these supplies to construct buildings at Pa Ya Lay army camp.

In addition to the physical exertion and loss of time involved in forced labour projects, villagers must typically supply their own food and tools for the specified work. In an example from July 27th 2008, SPDC LIB #90 battalion commander Aung Win Oo ordered the residents of Mee Teh Taw, Aung Chan Tha and Bpaw Bpee Der villages to repair the battalion's sentry boxes. Following the repair of the sentry boxes, Aung Win Oo ordered the villagers to serve as sentries on rotating shifts covering 24 hours a day.

Another form of forced labour which SPDC personnel enforce on relocated villagers has been various forms of agricultural work. In Gkoh Nee and Noh Nyah Lah village tracts of Mone Township, for example, SPDC LIB #599 forced all villages, which included numerous relocated communities, to plough the battalion's agricultural fields in rotating shifts during August 2006. The villagers were told they would later have to cultivate these fields, but were not told when or how. The same battalion forced Ng' Bpyaw Taw village to conduct forced agricultural work tending the camp's soybean plantation and also forced them to raise chickens and ducks for the soldiers' food. The battalion even forced the villagers to construct an enclosure in which to raise these birds without receiving any form of compensation.

Incidents of forced labour, while enforced with an often implicit threat of violent punishment for non-compliance, entail other risks to those villagers who do comply. For example, due to the heavy landmine deployment in sections of Nyaunglebin District (and other parts of Karen State), some forced labour tasks can require

villagers to traverse landmine-contaminated areas. In March 2008, SPDC authorities ordered Saw Gk---, a 34-year-old villager in Mone township, to collect, prepare and deliver bamboo poles. While collecting the bamboo at 3:30pm on Monday, March 31st, Saw Gk--- stepped on a landmine and was badly injured. Fellow villagers took him to a hospital where the doctors had to amputate the end of his leg in order to prevent infection and allow the wound to heal.



Villagers in Nyaunglebin District do forced labour by building a road on March 10th 2007. SPDC LIB #350 ordered local residents to construct the road from Taw Loo Koh village to Noh Poh village. The villagers can be seen here using mattocks to break up clay from the nearby fields which they then collected in wicker baskets and piled atop the road's surface. Both children and women are among those doing the forced labour. [Photo: KHRG]

Persistent forced labour, common at SPDC-controlled relocation sites, cuts into villagers' time for work on their own livelihoods. For agriculture (which is the predominant means of livelihood in Karen State), loss of work time can be disastrous, especially during crucial periods in the crop cycle.

"They [the villagers] usually do agriculture and maintain plantations. We haven't had a good opportunity to do our plantation work. The SPDC army camp is located beside our village. So we always have to do loh ah pay for them. We don't have much time to do our own work. Now we're doing their work, such as cutting bamboo poles and delivering them to their [SPDC] camp."

- Saw B--- (male, 24), Th--- village, Mone township (April 2008)

Extortion

"They [SPDC soldiers] always come to the village and order us to provide them with food such as pigs, goats, chickens and vegetables. They never give us any payment. We dare not to say anything to them even though they take our things without our permission."

- Saw B--- (male, 24), Th--- village, Mone township (April 2008)

Alongside movement restrictions and forced labour, relocated and other villagers in SPDC-controlled areas of Nyaunglebin District have also regularly faced extortion by local soldiers. Such extortion includes demands for cash, food and other supplies – sometimes under the pretence of taxation or punishment. Soldiers have demanded money from villagers for the benefit of their army unit, for personal use, to finance various festivities and for construction projects. For example, on September 6th 2008, SPDC soldiers from LIB #60, led by battalion commander Ko Ko Aung, and LIB #264, led by battalion deputy commander Aung San Win, demanded 250,000 kyat (US \$198.41) from Bp'Deh Gkaw, Thoo Gk'Bee, Noh Ghaw, Weh Lah Dtaw, Aay Nee, Bpa Dta La, Htaik Htoo and Leh Weh Gyee villages to be used to support new army recruits. The officers told the local villagers that information about this incident was not to be leaked to the international community.

On January 2007, LIB #599 battalion commander Dtin Bo Aung, based in Weh Lah Dtaw, demanded 100 baskets of paddy (valued at about 200,000 kyat (approx. US \$158.73)) from the residents of Weh Lah Dtaw village tract. The villagers collected paddy from each house and gave it to the army.

On January 4th 2007, LIB #350 battalion commander Than Naing, based in Baw Gka Hta in Kyauk Kyi township, ordered the residents of Baw Gka Hta village to participate in a football competition. Those villagers unable or unwilling to play were forced to pay 15,000 kyat (approx. US \$11.90). Whole villages that were unable or unwilling to play were forced to pay 500,000 kyat (approx. US \$396.83).

"When the SPDC soldiers demand things from the villagers, we have to struggle and strain to find those things for them, because they demand [compliance] without fail. The other villages have to do the same as well. The SPDC also demands money for the militia⁹ every month. We have to pay them 3,710 kyat (approx. US \$2.94) once every month. Sometimes, we also have to give them money for curry for their commanders. They also demand rice from the villagers every month. Each household has to give a bowl [1.6 kg. / 2.4 lb.] and 4 milk tins [0.78 kg. / 1.7 kg.] once each month. But if that's not enough for them, they come and demand more and we have to give them more... Actually, the commanders receive rations. Maybe it's not enough for them as well. The commander of this army camp is Yan Naing of LIB #599, but the army camp commander has never come to my village, only his soldiers."

- Saw H--- (male, 30), W--- village, Mone township (Aug 2006)

⁹ *Pyi Thoo Sit*; literally 'people's militia'. Villages in SPDC-controlled areas are forced to provide local residents to serve in these militias and forced to provide food and funds to support them.

In January 2007, when LIB #349 commander Than Htet and his soldiers encountered and fought with some KNLA soldiers in Mone township, one of the SPDC soldiers was killed. Commander Than Htet then demanded that local villagers pay for the soldier's funeral service. Thirteen villages in total were forced to contribute to the costs and each village had to pay 66,000 kyat (approx. US \$52.38). Commander Than Htet also forced Hton Wa Saik, Lay Bpin Weh and Hay Tha Weh village tracts from Kyauk Kyi township to buy and deliver a 1,200,000 kyat (approx. US \$952.38) motorcycle for the soldiers to use.

In some cases, demands for labour or supplies appear to have been demanded with the intention that, if villagers are unable to comply, they will have to pay cash instead. For example, on February 5th 2007, commander Khin Maung Oo of Strategic Operations Command #2, based in Mone township near Kyauk Kyi town, announced that he wanted to build a new army camp. Initially, he ordered each village in the area to prepare and deliver thatch shingles. However, when the villagers prepared the leaves for him, he refused them and demanded money instead. Khin Maung Oo demanded 100 kyat (approx. US \$0.08) per thatch shingle. The village names and amounts of thatch shingles demanded were as follows:

	Village Names	Amount of thatch shingles demanded	Cash paid in lieu of thatch shingles (kyat)	Cash paid in lieu of thatch shingles (approx. value in US \$)
1	Hton Wa Saik	1,200	120,000	95.24
2	Kyaut Sa Yit	1,200	120,000	95.24
3	Thoo Gk'Bee	500	50,000	39.68
4	Taw Kyaung Bpaw	1,200	120,000	95.24
5	Leh Weh Gyee	500	50,000	39.68
6	Bpa Dta La	700	70,000	55.55
7	Noh Ghaw	1,200	120,000	95.24
8	Aye Naing	2,000	200,000	158.73
9	Gyon Gyi	1,200	120,000	95.24
Village Tract Total:		9,700	970,000	769.84

In addition to the regular extortion of money, local SPDC soldiers also demand food from villagers including rice, chickens, salt, oil, fish paste. For example, on January 2007, LIB #599 battalion commander Dtin Bo Aung, based in Weh Lah Dtaw, demanded 100 baskets of paddy (with a value of about 200,000 kyat (approx. US \$158.73)) from Weh Lah Dtaw village tract. The villagers collected the paddy from each house and delivered it to the army camp.

"They [SPDC soldiers] sometimes arrive in our village. Every time they arrive, they order us to bring them food. They've caught our chickens and pigs behind our backs. We have to get [travel] permission passes from them and one pass costs 1,000 kyat (approx. US \$0.79). Whenever any army troops arrive at our village, they demand food from us such as chickens and other things. Every time they arrive, we must spend money – at least 1,000 kyat (approx. US \$0.79) – on them."

- Saw P--- (male, 25), P--- village, Kyauk Kyi township (Sept 2007)

"The soldiers [from LIB #599] travel past my village and frequently stop here. The soldiers demand loh ah pay [forced labour], rice and money from the villagers. When we went to do loh ah pay for them they didn't feed us any food. Instead, they told us we must look after them by giving them money and rice every month. Each household has to collect a bowl and a bit of rice to give to them once every month. As a village, we also have to give them 7,000 kyat (approx. US \$5.55) per month... When the soldiers come into the village, they demanded chicken and, when they see villagers that they know, they ask them for alcohol, snacks and tea and we have to give it to them."

- Saw D--- (male, 53), Dt--- village, Mone township (Aug 2006)

In some cases, SPDC personnel frame extortion as a 'fine' that is punishment for violating a given offence. For example, on July 30th 2007, Mah Nay Soe, a 35-year-old woman, and Maung Lay Way Soe, a 19-year-old man from Thoh Tan village, Kyauk Kyi township, stepped on an SPDC landmine when looking for bamboo shoots in their old village at Hsa Leh. LIB #599 deputy commander Yan Naing then fined them 20,000 kyat (approx. US \$15.87) for revealing the location of the landmine.

Following the devastating outcome of Cyclone Nargis in the Irrawaddy Delta on May 2nd – 3rd 2008, Ko Ko Oo, commander of SPDC LIB #590, ordered villagers in north-western Nyaunglebin District to hand over money by May 26th 2008, which Ko Ko Oo said would be sent to victims of the cyclone.¹⁰

In some cases, extortionate demands have been applied to movement restrictions. Military personnel have established numerous checkpoints at which they demand fees for permission to pass. For example, when the SPDC constructed a dam at Kyauk T'Gah in Shwegyin township in 2006, LIB #57 and LID #11 placed checkpoints along the river – one on each river bank at Boh Loh and Htoo Day. If the villagers wanted to go to their plantations across the river, they had to pay 200 kyat (approx. US \$0.16) per person each way.

Arbitrary detention, torture and killing

On allegation of having had contact with members of the Karen National Union (KNU) or the KNLA, military personnel of the SPDC have arbitrarily detained, tortured and in some cases killed civilians in Nyaunglebin District. On September 12th 2008, SPDC soldiers staying at Kyauk Kyi army camp arrested two villagers: 50-year-old Saw Meh Doh from Bloo Doh Loo village and 54-year-old Saw Yar Gkoh from Ng' Bpyaw Taw village, both in Kyauk Kyi township. The soldiers accused these villagers of communicating with the KNLA. They harassed and beat Saw Yar Gkoh until he 'confessed' to being a KNLA soldier. KHRG has since then received no news of whether Saw Yar Gkoh has been released.

On June 29th 2007, 48-year-old Saw Htee Pyoh Cho, from Bp'Nah Ner village, Kyauk Kyi township, was suspected by SPDC soldiers of having contacted the KNU. As a consequence, the soldiers arrested Htee Pyoh Cho and sent him to a detention

¹⁰ For more details of this incident see KHRG, *Military expansion and exploitation in Nyaunglebin District* (August 2008).

centre at Toungoo town. Once there, he was severely tortured during interrogation and summarily executed. When Saw Htee Pyoh Cho had gone to meet the SPDC soldiers, he had with him 200,000 kyat (approx. US \$158.73). However, after he was executed, the SPDC soldiers only returned 20,000 kyat (approx. US \$15.87) to his wife. The death of Saw Htee Pyoh Cho widowed his wife and six children, all of whom have since struggled to survive without his support.

Cumulative impact of abuse and restrictions

"I was bothered by SPDC soldiers while working. We didn't have freedom to do our work. They wouldn't allow us to travel at night and they obstructed us from doing our work. They only gave us permission to travel on the days they selected. They allowed us to travel three days a week – these were Wednesday to Friday. Most of the villagers in my village sell food at markets as their occupation. We trade durian and betel nut. People also cultivate hill fields, but not flat fields. They [SPDC soldiers] blocked us from transporting these foods and we couldn't travel as we wished. Because of this, we couldn't do our work in time and some of the villagers' fruits were spoiled. Most of the villagers traded food as their occupation. But not all of the villagers could get enough food. There are three SPDC army camps situated in our area. The soldiers entered the village regularly and they also threatened the villagers. There were some people who fled from the village with me as well. I reached this place [an IDP camp in Nyaunglebin District] two days ago. When we first moved here, we faced a food problem because we couldn't carry enough food with us. When we were fleeing, we didn't take all of our supplies. I came here with one of my children and the other two were left behind in the village."

- Naw L--- (female, 33), M--- village, Mone township (Aug 2006)

Villagers living at relocation sites and other villages in SPDC-controlled areas of Nyaunglebin District face regular demands for forced labour, food, money and other supplies as well as movement restrictions carried out by the local SPDC army. The combined impact of these abuses, in terms of decreased food, finances and time, has negatively impacted villagers' food and financial security, livelihoods and access to education and health care. Many villagers have, therefore, chosen to flee from relocation sites and other SPDC-controlled villages into situations of displacement in hiding. As many villagers in Karen State have a strong attachment to their land, they have typically sought (at least initially) to flee to hiding sites located within non-SPDC controlled areas of Nyaunglebin District in order to remain at least relatively close to their home villages. However, those living in these areas face their own unique set of humanitarian and human rights challenges.

V. Life in non-SPDC-controlled areas

"The Burmese [SPDC] soldiers attacked our village and burned down our home. When they entered to our village, they took our things such as pots, plates and clothing and also took our pigs and chickens as well. They also burned down our rice storage barns. They came to our village this year as well, but didn't enter the village. We're afraid of them, so we try to flee from them and find hiding sites for ourselves. We've had to stay in the jungle up to a whole week, sometimes more than a week."

- Naw K--- (female, 23), Gk--- village, Mone township (April 2008)

In seeking to evade forced relocation programmes and SPDC control, many villagers have fled to temporary hiding sites in the surrounding forest. These displaced families typically remain at such sites, return to their abandoned villages or relocate further afield, depending on the ongoing movement of local military forces. At such hiding sites, displaced villagers find it difficult to maintain their livelihoods, address health concerns and provide education and other services to their communities. Furthermore, Burma Army patrols continue to hunt down displaced communities.



A young boy carries water in April 2008 while his father prepares a shelter at an IDP hiding site in Mone township of Nyaunglebin District. [Photo: KHRG]

Threats of military attacks compound the challenges for those living in hiding. Nevertheless, such displaced villagers have employed a range of strategies to support themselves at hiding sites and have also, in some cases, been able to return to their abandoned villages to retrieve supplies left behind or to tend crops. In order to do so, displaced villagers have monitored SPDC troop movements and responded accordingly to changes in military deployment. In order to provide educations for their children, displaced villagers in hiding typically set up make-shift schools in the forest. In order to treat ailments, villagers have made use of traditional medicine and naturally available treatments. When possible, displaced villagers have accessed food, education and medical support from indigenous organisations delivering aid cross-border from Thailand. However, despite such efforts, displaced communities in hiding in Nyaunglebin District continue to face a host of challenges.

Attacks, killing and looting

"They [the villagers] only built small huts and stayed on their farm. The SPDC didn't see us as villagers. They deemed us to be their enemies. So when they saw us, they shot to kill us all."

- Saw Hs--- (male, 57), K---village, Kyauk Kyi township (Nov 2007)

The SPDC has hunted down and attacked displaced communities, applied a shoot-on-sight policy, and deployed landmines around villages in areas where it lacks consolidated control over the population. In Nyaunglebin District, such non-SPDC-controlled areas comprise much of the eastern mountains. During attacks, SPDC soldiers destroy shelters, agricultural fields, food stores, schools and other buildings. The attacks and shoot-on-sight policy function to undermine the ability of civilian populations to reside in the hills. If successful, villagers in these areas will typically either have to relocate to military-controlled areas in the plains, move to IDP sites elsewhere in Karen State or try to enter Thailand-based refugee camps or seek work as migrant workers in Thailand or elsewhere.

"I went to my field to make an offering to the spirits because I had already finished my work and was on my way home. I had also cut some banana flowers to eat. Then I heard footsteps on the path. So I waited to see who it was. I was old, so I couldn't see him clearly. I thought he was the hunter and then another person came up and he called me. Then I knew something was going wrong. So I turned my head and they [SPDC IB #56 soldiers] shot at me. Luckily, I wasn't hit. So I ran back to my house and told them [the villagers] about the incident and we fled together. We couldn't carry very many things with us. We could carry only pots, some rice and some other food. The rest of our goods were left behind. So the rice that was left behind was all taken by the SPDC soldiers."

- Saw Y--- (male, 65), S--- village, Shwegyin township (Dec 2006)

At the end of January 2007 a 20-year-old villager from Dter Muh Kee village, Mone township, lost his leg after stepping on a landmine, reportedly planted in the area by soldiers from LIB #567 following an attack on Nwa Hta village on January 22nd. The villager received treatment in a KNU clinic. Similarly, a 30-year-old villager from Kho

Hta village died immediately after stepping on a landmine that had been placed by the SPDC following an attack on Dta Muh Kha Day village on January 11th.

On February 1st 2007, SPDC IB #218 attacked displaced communities from Dta Say Der, Dtaw Oo Kee, Paw Kee and Hsaw Oh Hta villages in Shwegyin township. Upon the attack, residents had to flee further into the surrounding forest. The SPDC Army then spent five days patrolling the surrounding area in search of displaced villages. However, following the withdrawal of IB #218, the villagers were able to return to reoccupy their homes.

On April 30th 2007, SPDC LIB #220, based at Per Day near Htee Thoo Kee village tract, came to Ta Hoe village tract, destroyed villagers' rice stores, dumping the contents of rice sacks on the ground and in a nearby stream. Then, on May 11th 2007, LIB #220 arrived at Htee Nya Mo Kee village tract, looted villagers' possessions and burnt down the rice field of Saw Thaw Shwe. Subsequently, on May 24th 2007, these same troops attacked Htee Thoo Kee and Htee Meh Kah Lah villages, located close to Maw Hpoo village tract. At the time, the soldiers burnt down 12 big tins of rice belonging to Saw Eh Kaw Htoo as well as a rice field belonging to Saw Pa Ku. Because of these operations, villagers in the area were not able to work freely. Some local villagers fled towards the Thailand border.

In a separate incident, SPDC soldiers operating in the area of Htee Blah Kee village, Shwegyin township attacked Naw Th--- and three others on October 9th 2007. The soldiers fired their rifles and shelled Naw Th--- with mortars. Although suffering injuries to her right arm and left leg, Naw Th--- managed to escape with her life. In the following account related to KHRG on October 19th 2007, Naw Th--- described the incident in her own words.

"The SPDC [soldiers] shot me over one week ago already. They shot and injured my right arm. It didn't injure my bone. The SPDC shot me when I was in my hillside farm house. At the time when they shot me there were five of us. There were two people who were injured and the other was my Aunty. When I was injured I couldn't walk, I just crawled on the ground. I also wounded my leg. I don't know how I wounded my leg. I know only that I got a pain in my leg and it became twisted. When it became painful, I stopped running and the SPDC shot at me from behind and they also fired mortar shells one or two times. I wasn't able to catch up with the people who were running ahead of me. I just stayed alone in the forest. I couldn't run very far – only a short distance and my brother came back and found me the next day. I had to sleep one night in a stream in the forest and my arm was bleeding a lot. Also the rain was falling and I had to sleep in the rain and I felt cold and I also got dizzy and I couldn't get any rice. The SPDC first shot at me at eight o'clock and early the next morning my brother came back and found me."



Following an attack on Htee Blah Kee village in Shwegyin township of Nyaunglebin District by soldiers from SPDC LIB #217 of LID #11 during the second week of October 2007, the local residents fled in to the jungle. These photos show the Htee Blah Kee villagers returning to their abandoned village after the SPDC left. *[Photo: KHRG]*



Food Insecurity

"We must always flee from the SPDC [soldiers] when they arrive in the village. Some people have had to leave their hill fields like me. They dare not to go back to check them. The SPDC Army soldiers were very active in the area where I previously stayed and so I moved here nearly a year ago. I dared not go back to take my food that was [left behind] in my village. So I had to borrow food from my friends."

- Saw S--- (male, 50), L--- village, Shwegyin township (Oct 2007)

Persistent attacks on displaced communities in hiding, the deployment of landmines in civilian areas and restrictions on movement within and out of non-SPDC-controlled areas have greatly undermined villagers' abilities to maintain their livelihoods. The ongoing risk of being shot restricts displaced villagers' efforts to tend agricultural land and plantations and to travel to SPDC-controlled towns to sell goods and trade. Where soldiers remain near a given village following an attack, displaced residents are unable to easily return to collect food or tend crops left behind. As a result, villagers' fields may rot or be destroyed by insects or wild animals. During attacks, villagers cannot take much food as anything taken along must be carried. Supplies left behind are typically looted or destroyed by SPDC troops. To make matters worse, many villagers dare not to go back to their farm fields as SPDC soldiers often deploy landmines in fields and in and around villages to prevent the return of displaced villagers. These combined factors have created severe food shortages at hiding sites.

As an example, beginning on November 1st 2007, SPDC soldiers from LIBs #218 and 219, under TOC #1 of LID #11, began patrolling the areas of Ka Dee Muh Der and Law Gklaw Kee villages located on the border of Kyauk Kyi and Shwegyin townships. On November 12th, these soldiers looted and destroyed the belongings of villagers living in the area. Among the items destroyed were the rice storage barns of Saw Hs--- (containing 30 baskets of paddy) and Saw Ht--- (containing 15 baskets of paddy and 3 baskets of rice). At this time, the soldiers also looted the hut of Naw R--- from which they took everything, including one musket. Subsequently, on November 19th these same soldiers deployed landmines along the irrigation canal of the farm fields located near Ler Wah village while patrolling the area. Being mid-November, the villagers of Ler Wah were in the midst of harvesting their paddy crops and thus the risk of their detonating these landmines was high.

"I didn't have a good chance to cultivate my hill field because it was destroyed by the SPDC soldiers. The SPDC Army soldiers are staying near my hill field. So I dare not to go back to weed the grass which has grown in the field."

- Saw M--- (male, 34), W--- village, Shwegyin township (Oct 2007)

"Every time when the Burmese [SPDC] soldiers have arrived at our village, we've had to flee. So we haven't had time to take care of our paddy plants in the fields. They [the farm fields] are covered with weeds. If the SPDC didn't disturb us, we'd have enough food every year. For me, I dare not go and check my betel nut plantation because the SPDC Army camp is located beside my plantation."

- Naw K--- (female, 23), Gk--- village, Mone township (April 2008)

Confronting the destruction of farm fields and food supplies, displaced villagers in hiding must typically travel far in search of food. In the process, they risk being shot on sight by patrolling SPDC soldiers. On November 15th 2007, for example, SPDC soldiers from LIBs #218 and 219 shot and killed Saw Ler Gkay, a 28-year-old Karen villager from K--- village in Gkwee Lah village tract, Kyauk Kyi township. Saw Ler Gkay was married and had three children between the ages of three months and six years. Since his death, his surviving wife has faced increasing difficulties in supporting her children and herself.

Health

"My wife died when my son was a year and six months old. I have four children but all the older children died from sickness. My wife died from tuberculosis and one-by-one my children died. Two died from cholera; the oldest one died five months after his mother and the second one two years later. One of my children died at M--- from high fever and shock while I was on the way here. When we reached M---, I couldn't call to him [could get no response from him] and not so long after he died. He was only eight years old. My youngest son got sick on the way here too, but now he has been treated with good medicine and has recovered and can eat some food. There were many villagers or children tortured by the SPDC soldiers. As we had to run from place to place [from the SPDC], the district and township clinics couldn't look after us very well."

- Saw S--- (male, 43), K--- village, --- township (Feb 2007)

Health problems for displaced communities in hiding are closely linked to military attacks, destruction of farm fields, food stores and food storage facilities, restrictions on travel and trade and the destruction and restriction of access to medical supplies. Health issues affecting displaced villagers in non-SPDC-controlled areas of Nyaunglebin District include: malnutrition, birthing complications with consequent high rates of infant and maternal mortality and a host of preventable diseases interrelated to malnutrition and a lack of preventative medicines and devices. Much of the health crisis in these areas is underpinned by constant food insecurity.

"They [displaced villagers in hiding] don't have a good shelter and also don't get enough food to eat. They face different kinds of ailments such as fevers, headaches and diarrhoea. They have to look after each other. Some villagers don't have sufficient or good-quality medicine, so they've died in the jungle."

- Saw P--- (male, 42), T--- village, Mone township (April 2008)

Frequently cited ailments include: malaria, tuberculosis, diarrhoea, fevers, chronic coughing and headaches. In situations of displacement, possessions are limited to what villagers can carry and those fleeing the military often prioritise food supplies over medicine. The lack of mosquito nets available at hiding sites means that incidences of malaria are unnecessarily high. (Efforts to ward off mosquitoes by lighting a fire can reveal the hiding site of displaced villagers and so this option is not always possible.) Along with malaria, other mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue fever and diseases caused by ingesting contaminated food and water are also prevalent.

"People are getting sick while running away in the forest because they don't have enough food to eat and are often starving. When people are staying in the forest, they dare not go back to get rice from their village. The common diseases which people are facing are malaria, headaches and diarrhoea. Some people get better and some don't. I get malaria, headaches and dysentery sometimes but I have no medicines to take. We haven't seen anybody come to help us with medical care."

- Saw K--- (male, 17), L--- village, Shwegyin township (Jan 2007)

Given the Army's heavy restrictions on travel and trade, purchasing medicine has become increasingly difficult. Many displaced communities in hiding, therefore, employ traditional natural remedies using locally available ingredients with which villagers have been able to treat a wide variety of ailments. According to villagers, the effectiveness of such measures varies greatly. Such natural remedies, where available, remain a common and often preferred means of treating medical ailments amongst displaced communities in hiding as these methods are available locally and villagers are generally more familiar with their usage.

"One of my sisters got a disease and died when my mother was running in the jungle. They made natural medicine from plants but when the baby was two months old she died from a disease. At that time we had gone to make a new village. I got a stomach ache, couldn't breathe smoothly and got malaria. Sometimes I get medicine when I'm sick, but sometimes not. I've never had vaccinations."

- Saw N--- (male, 21), L--- village, --- township (Feb 2007)

Some pregnant women at displaced hiding sites in Nyaunglebin District have had no more than the warmth of a fire while they delivered. Others have not even had this minor comfort. Many of the displaced villagers in this area have also developed diarrhoea due to the poor conditions at their hiding sites.

"They [the displaced villagers] don't have good shelters and also don't get enough food to eat. They are facing different kinds of health problems such as fever, headaches and diarrhoea. They have had to look after each other. Some of the villagers haven't had enough food or good-quality medicine, so they've died in the forest. Some pregnant women have had to deliver their babies in the forest. They were only able to use a fire [to keep warm after delivery], as they didn't have any medicine when they gave birth to their babies. They usually treat themselves with traditional medicines, but some have died when they've delivered their babies."

- Saw P--- (male, 42), T--- village, Mone township (April 2008)

Education

"When we were fleeing in the forest, the teachers tried to open classes in the forest under the trees and bamboo but they always had to prepare themselves to flee so that, if they heard the Burmese soldiers were approaching, they could escape. Everyone had to be aware of the information about the movements of patrolling soldiers all the time. Students could learn Karen

language in the school because this school was not under SPDC control. If the Burmese [SPDC] soldiers did not come to our village, the students would be very happy with their school. But, most of the time, we had to flee into the forest. The teachers faced a food problem because the parents of students couldn't provide them with enough food. Students who don't have enough food can't attend classes regularly either. Some parents cannot send their children to school because they don't have enough food to eat or money to spend on their children. Students can't study very well in the forest. If Burmese [SPDC] soldiers see villagers or students or KNLA, they'll kill them all."

- Saw K--- (male, 17), L--- village, Shwegyin township (Jan 2007)

Limited access to education has been a major concern of displaced communities. Schools have been burnt down along with other village structures during military attacks. Communities fleeing their homes have had to prioritise food above school supplies. It has, furthermore, been difficult to restart schools following displacement in the forest due to ongoing SPDC operations and troop movement. While communities have typically been able to establish some sort of education following displacement, this can prove especially difficult so long as army patrols continue in the area or while the rainy season is underway.

"In the past, I often had to flee to the forest during school days. In 2004, SPDC [soldiers] entered our village and destroyed our school and then I couldn't continue my school in the village and I had to continue my school in the forest. I felt sad because I couldn't study very well and, moreover, our parents had to look for rice. The SPDC [soldiers] came and destroyed our houses."

- Naw Hs--- (female, 14), G--- village, Shwegyin township (Feb 2008)

"If the Burmese [SPDC soldiers] come, we flee and we can't go to school. We have to study under the trees and bamboo. We continue our schooling like this. Another problem is that we have to look for rice and have to go to far away and collect the rice and bring it back. On such days, we can't attend school."

- Naw H--- (female, 13), Ht--- village, --- township (Feb 2008)

As resources are very scarce, higher levels of education can be difficult to achieve. But a blackboard can be made out of bamboo or wooden planks or the face of a rock outcropping and children can study under the shelter of the trees. Moreover, when displaced communities are unable to build schools in their own areas, parents may send their children to attend schools in other areas. Displaced villagers may also be able to access educational assistance from local organisations like the Karen Teachers' Working Group and the Karen Education Department of the KNU.

As an example of villagers' efforts to educate their children despite the challenges of displacement, in March 2006 local villagers fled into the jungle when the SPDC established a camp on Ro Ka Soh Mountain, in Kwih Lah village tract of northern Shwegyin township. Shortly after arriving at their hiding site, teachers and local village leaders called a meeting with students' parents to discuss the reopening of the school. As the villagers did not know when the SPDC troops would withdraw from their village, they organised a temporary school at their hiding site in the forest. By

the following day, the villagers had prepared a blackboard and school materials and some of them volunteered to serve as teachers so that the children would be able to study.¹¹

Despite ongoing military attacks against displaced communities in hiding and commensurate food insecurity, livelihoods vulnerability, malnutrition, ill health and limited access to education, many villagers still choose displacement in hiding over life under military control.¹²

¹¹ For more information on this incident of displacement and the subsequent construction of a community school see KHRG, *SPDC Attacks on Villages in Nyaunglebin and Papun Districts and the Civilian Response* (September 2006).

¹² TBBC in its 2008 survey of internal displacement in eastern Burma estimated that about 21,000 villagers remained in hiding in SPDC-defined Kyauk Kyi and Shwegyin townships. See TBBC, *Internal Displacement and International Law in Eastern Burma* (October 2008).

VI. Conclusion

"When I came here [to an IDP camp along the Thai border], some other displaced people came too, but some stayed back in the forest [at hiding sites in Nyaunglebin District]. If the situation worsens, they'll surely come here as well. The trip [to get to the IDP camp] took about two weeks. The place where we're staying now is called E---. We haven't even finished constructing our house. In the future, if there is peace, I hope to go back and stay in my own land."

- Saw G--- (male, 36), M---village, Mone township (Dec 2006)

Levels of military control across Karen State are varied. Many areas are now under the consolidated control of the SPDC (especially in the plains and in the south). But in other areas (principally in the forested mountains in the north), State authorities lack local-level control over the civilian population. Though not absolutely clear cut, this division is, nevertheless, evident in Nyaunglebin District, where the plains are now mostly under firm SPDC control, while much of the hills remain outside such control. As State authorities have sought to extend military control over the region's population, the Burma Army has pursued a policy of forcibly relocating communities residing in the difficult-to-control hills into the more easy-to-control plains. Forced relocation sites are typically situated alongside SPDC-controlled vehicle roads, army camps and bases. At such locations, military personnel can more readily exploit the local civilian population.

The patterns of abuse confronted by civilians in Nyaunglebin District are largely determined by the extent of military control over a given community. At relocation sites and SPDC-controlled villages, residents face regular demands for labour, money, food and supplies and heavy restrictions on travel to agricultural fields, plantations and neighbouring villages and towns. These abuses have unduly burdened local communities, cut into limited financial resources, food supplies and work time, leading to poverty, food insecurity and a reduced ability to access and afford education, healthcare and other services. Many villagers in Nyaunglebin District have, therefore, fled in order to avoid relocation altogether or to avoid persistent exploitative abuse in SPDC-controlled areas post-relocation.

Destinations of escape include: urban areas inside Burma, hiding sites in Nyaunglebin District or elsewhere in Karen State, refugee camps in Thailand and migrant worker communities abroad. Those who choose to flee but remain at displaced hiding sites near their home villages face the constant threat of attack by Burma Army patrols. In order to force civilian communities out of the hills, the Burma Army has sought to make life unbearable for villagers who have resisted forced relocation by committing the following abuses: applying a shoot-on-sight policy; attacking hiding sites and non-SPDC-controlled villages with mortars; burning down farm fields, food stores, homes and other buildings; deploying landmines in civilian areas; and restricting travel into and out of non-SPDC-controlled areas. These attacks prompt residents to flee, but many attempt to return to their homes after Burma Army patrols have moved on. These patterns of abuse and response have led to ongoing cycles of displacement for many communities in Karen State.

Villagers' options in effectively responding to forced relocation and other abuses constrict and expand according to many factors, including changes in military deployment, the severity of local military officials and their own abilities to resist the abuses perpetrated against them. Villagers' options in addressing their intertwined humanitarian and human rights concerns are thus heavily contingent on the resources available to them and their own freedom to decide how to make use of these resources. At present, the most effective means for external actors to support displaced and potentially displaced villagers' in Nyaunglebin District, and many other areas of rural eastern Burma, is by providing financial, logistical and capacity-building support for indigenous organisations delivering aid cross-border from Thailand. The needs of local communities and the capacities of local organisations to support these communities require far more international support than is presently being offered.



Noh Ghaw village as seen on March 1st shortly after being dismantled by local residents who were forced to relocate to a military-controlled site. Local SPDC authorities often order villagers to dismantle homes and other structures prior to relocating. *[Photo: KHRG]*







