



Despite intensive SPDC militarisation of the region, attacks against villages and widespread displacement, villagers strive to maintain cultural practices and continuity in their lives as best they can. The villagers in this photo came together to celebrate Karen New Year in Papun District on December 19th 2006.



Villagers in Bo Pyin Township, Tenneserim Division, after gathering for a memorial service for 5 villagers recently killed by landmines during June 2007. The majority of the villagers who attended the service arrived by boat. They told KHRG travelling on foot is too dangerous because footpaths and the forest are heavily mined.

III. LIFE IN SPDC-CONTROLLED AREAS

As the KNU/KNLA has increasingly lost its footing, more and more Karen areas have come under the control of central State authorities and/or local allies like the DKBA. Still, however, the level of militarisation remains high even in those SPDC-controlled areas which are no longer 'contested' by the KNLA in any significantly tangible sense. Burma Army units are deployed across the region and in some areas the numbers are still increasing. The DKBA, now explicitly allied with the SPDC, also continues to expand; in a May 2009 meeting, the group stated it aims to expand its numbers to 9,000 soldiers as part of its transformation into a Border Guard Force.

The heavy concentration of Burma Army and DKBA battalions deployed to the area are expected to be 'self-reliant,' and 'live off the land' by meeting their resource needs locally. With insufficient financial and logistical support provided to military units operating in the field, soldiers and low-level officers deployed there have become dependent on civilian support, most commonly through forced labour, various forms of arbitrary 'taxation', ad hoc 'fees' and looting. In this way, civilians in SPDC-controlled areas function as an important resource base for army units in field. As a consequence, the military has pursued forced relocation campaigns to flush villagers out of the difficult-to-control hills and into the more easily controlled villages and relocation sites in the plains and along vehicle roads. Those forcibly relocated, like those previously living in plains, must try to eke out a living under exploitative forms of local governance that are used to strengthen and support the very military institutions which exploit them. As scenes of life in such areas, this section of the photo album contains images of forced relocation, life in relocation sites, and villagers engaged in forced labour in areas under SPDC control.



An order document announcing forced relocation posted by SPDC LIB #439 in a village in Nyaunglebin District during April 2006. The order directed all houses to be dismantled within three days, after which SPDC soldiers were to burn all that remained so that forcibly relocated villagers had nothing to which to return.



The photo to the left shows shelters built by villagers living at a SLORC relocation site in Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District in 1993. The area is grazing land and had not previously been inhabited; it floods each year during the June to October rainy season.



In the photo to the left, villagers from Kyauk Kyi Township cart rice supplies to Nyaun Gone, where they had been ordered to hand it over to the SLORC. SLORC troops then guarded the rice, divided it by family, and rationed it back out a few days or months at a time. The villagers told KHRG that the rations were never enough to feed their families.