

Briefing

Burma

Visit to the Karen and Mon Peoples on the Thailand-Burma Border

February 2007



Christian Solidarity Worldwide
Voice for the Voiceless

PO Box 99, New Malden, Surrey KT3 3YF
T: 020 8942 8810 **E:** admin@csw.org.uk **W:**
www.csw.org.uk
REGISTERED CHARITY NO. 281836

© Christian Solidarity Worldwide. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, photocopying, mechanical, recording and/or otherwise without the prior written permission of Christian Solidarity Worldwide.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Visit to the Karen and Mon Peoples on the Thailand-Burma Border

27 February-8 March, 2007

1. Executive Summary	2
2. Purposes.....	3
3. Visit to Karen Internally Displaced People (IDPs).....	3
4. Visit to the Mon	4
5. Conclusions and Recommendations.....	6

1. Executive Summary

Burma's ruling military regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), is continuing to perpetrate gross violations of human rights in all parts of the country. In addition to the suppression of democracy, the continued detention of Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, the imprisonment of more than 1,100 prisoners of conscience, and the forcible conscription of child soldiers, the Burma Army is continuing to terrorise the ethnic nationality groups. In Karen State, in the past year more than 25,000 civilians have been displaced in the worst offensive by the regime in almost a decade.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW)¹ makes regular fact-finding visits to different parts of Burma and its border areas. From 27 February-8 March CSW conducted another visit to the Thailand-Burma border. CSW arranged for the UK's Shadow Secretary of State for International Development, Andrew Mitchell MP, to visit Karen Internally Displaced People (IDPs) at Ei Htu Ta, Karen State, Burma, on the banks of the Salween River, with the Free Burma Rangers, Partners Relief and Development and the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP). CSW also visited the Mon people in Sangkhlaburi, Thailand for the first time.

In interviews with CSW, Karen IDPs provided fresh evidence of the gross violations perpetrated by the SPDC, including incidents in the last year. One woman told how her son was beheaded. Another described how her husband was tortured, tied to a tree, his eyes gouged out and then drowned. A third recalled how her husband was killed – his eyes torn out, his ears and lips cut off.

¹ CSW is an international human rights advocacy organisation, with partners and affiliates in the UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand, India, Hong Kong, Norway, Denmark and France, and advocacy staff based in London and Brussels. CSW has made many visits to the Thai-Burmese border over the past twenty years.

Human rights violations continue in Mon State as well, despite a ceasefire between the New Mon State Party (NMSA) and the SPDC since 1995. Forced labour and land confiscation remain widespread.

CSW urges the European Union to strengthen its Common Position on Burma, calls on the United Kingdom to provide humanitarian support for the IDPs, and urges the United Nations Security Council to take action to bring an end to the humanitarian crisis in Burma and put pressure on the SPDC to enter tripartite dialogue with the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the ethnic nationalities.

2. Purposes

- a) To arrange a visit for the Shadow Secretary of State for International Development Andrew Mitchell MP to the Thai-Burmese border;
- b) To obtain up-to-date evidence of human rights violations in Burma;
- c) To obtain information about the plight of Karen Internally Displaced People (IDPs);
- d) To establish relations with the Mon people;
- e) To obtain information about the current situation in Mon State.

3. Visit to Karen Internally Displaced People (IDPs)

CSW arranged a visit to Karen IDPs at Ei Htu Ta, on the banks of the Salween River, for the UK's Shadow Secretary of State for International Development, Andrew Mitchell MP, Lord Ashcroft, and their staff. CSW would like to thank the Free Burma Rangers, Partners Relief and Development, the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP) and the Camp Leader for facilitating this visit.

The camp was established in April 2006. CSW previously visited the camp in November 2006. The camp has a clinic with 22 health workers. The major diseases are malaria, dysentery and respiratory tract infection. There is also a school, with 17 teachers and 383 children up to Grade 7. There are 750 children in the camp aged between 5-12. There are currently 2,913 IDPs at Ei Htu Ta, all of whom have fled their homes within the past year.

The delegation interviewed several IDPs. The following are summaries of their stories. Their names and the names of their villages have been omitted from this report for security reasons:

Interview 1: Naw SP, aged 60, from X village in Tongoo District

In 2006, the Burma Army attacked and occupied her village, and looted property. They burned down the houses, and the villagers fled. Naw SP fled with two of her five

children, aged 40, 30, 29, 28 and 20. She walked over a month to reach the border. Three of her children are still inside. Seven villagers were shot dead.

Three years ago, Naw SP's husband was killed when he went to the nearby town to buy food. The Burma Army tied his hands, dragged him through the jungle, tied him to a tree upside down, gouged out his eyes and then drowned him.

Interview 2: Naw PT, aged 60, from X village in Tongoo District

Naw PT came from the same village as Naw SP. "We were not able to survive in our area, so we came here," she said. She fled to the border in April 2006 with six of her children, aged 40, 35, 25, 20, 19 and 17, and they walked more than one month. She had seven children, but one son was killed aged 15. He was arrested by the Burma Army, tied to a tree and tortured. They cut off his head.

Interview 3: Naw WS, from X village, Mon Township, Nauglybien District

Naw WS fled to the camp with her three children: a 9 year-old girl, a 6 year-old boy and a 3 year-old girl. Her husband had been killed in 2006 by the Burma Army. He was on his way home from his farm, when soldiers caught him. They carried him through the village, and then tore out his eyes, cut off his lips and cut off both ears. Then they let him go, and he died alone in the forest.

Interview 4: Naw HH, from Y village, Tongoo District

Naw HH fled to the camp in November 2006 because the Burma Army burned down her village and rice barns, and shot her husband. Ten families fled the village, and the Burma Army shot her husband as he was running. She has three children – a son aged 16, a daughter aged 15 and a son aged 10.

4. Visit to the Mon

CSW has worked for almost 20 years with the Karen and Karenni, and in recent years with the Shan, Chin and Kachin, but until this visit we have not had any contact with the Mon. We therefore believed it was important to visit the Mon organisations based in Sangkhlaburi, Thailand, to establish relations, obtain information about the situation in Mon State, and discuss ways of working together in the future. CSW met with several Mon civil society, relief and development and political organisations.

The population of Mon State is estimated to be 2.5 million, but with a further 500,000 Mon who have fled to Thailand as migrant workers.

Political situation

The main resistance organisation in Mon State, the New Mon State Party (NMSP), signed a ceasefire agreement with the SPDC in 1995. After signing a ceasefire, the NMSP agreed to attend the SPDC's National Convention as a full participant after it was first convened in 1993. However, in the most recent sessions of the National Convention since 2005 the NMSP has attended as an observer, not a full participant. As a result of

this decision not to play a full part in the National Constitution, tension has grown between the SPDC and the NMSP. This tension worsened after the NMSP refused to sign a statement criticising the United States for proposing a resolution on Burma at the UN Security Council. When they first agreed a ceasefire the SPDC gave the NMSP money for food supplies and special trading privileges, but now these benefits have been withdrawn.

According to the Mon representatives, most Mon people have no trust that the Constitution drafted by the National Convention will be fair or representative, and no one believes the referendum will truly be free and fair, unless there are international, independent monitors to observe the referendum process.

According to one senior Mon representative, the NMSP retains its arms “not because we want to fight, but because we have to be ready to defend our lives. If the NMSP gives up its arms, it should only do so to the United Nations, and not to the SPDC.” He urged the UN Security Council to address the crisis in Burma.

Human Rights Violations

Despite this ceasefire agreement, however, human rights abuses continue to be perpetrated by the Burma Army, in particular in southern areas around Ye township where a splinter group continues to fight the Burma Army. Forced labour and land confiscation are particularly widespread.

According to the Human Rights Foundation of Monland, the Burma Army continues to use forced labour for road and bridge construction projects and portering. For many villages, people are required to provide three weeks’ forced labour every month. This disrupts crop production cycles, and in some places villagers are forbidden from tending their crops in case they support the resistance.

Land confiscation is a major problem. According to the report *No Land To Farm*², more than 8,000 acres have been confiscated, between Yee Phyu and Than Phyu Zayup, resulting in the displacement of over 10,000 people. The SPDC has brought in more than 13 new battalions to these areas, and used forced labour to build army camps. Each camp has 200-300 acres, providing it with land for fruit trees, water and other resources. There has been a build-up of military and naval bases on the coast-line, as the regime fears an international invasion from the sea.

Humanitarian Situation

There is an urgent need for humanitarian assistance in Mon State, particularly for healthcare, education and water. The major diseases are malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis B.

² *No Land to Farm: A Comprehensive Report on Land, Real Estates and Properties Confiscations in Mon Area, Burma 1998-2002*, Human Rights Foundation of Monland, October 2003

There are three “resettlement” sites for Mon IDPs who have fled human rights abuses, mostly from southern Ye area. As of January 2007, the total in these three camps is 11,948. Each camp has a hospital, and these were previously funded by Medicins sans Frontiers (MSF) until 2005 when they withdrew.

The Mon Education Department oversees 800 teachers working in 186 schools in NMSP-controlled areas, as well as part-time Mon language teachers in 189 SPDC-run schools in SPDC-controlled areas. Although officially the SPDC does not allow the teaching of Mon language, in many areas it can be taught as an extra subject. There are also schools in the three resettlement camps, with a total of 2984 students and 91 teachers.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

In light of the continuing military offensive against civilians in Karen State, which has resulted in the displacement of over 25,000 people, the widespread, systematic use of rape, torture, bodily mutilation and killings in Karen State and in other areas, as well as the continuing use of forced labour and other abuses in Mon State, human rights violations taking place throughout Burma, and the continuing detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and over 1,100 political prisoners, CSW makes the following recommendations to the international community:

- To the European Union – to strengthen the Common Position on Burma;
- To the United Nations – for the Security Council to continue to monitor the situation and to take action to bring an end to the gross violations of human rights, and for the Secretary-General to increase his engagement through the use of his “good offices” in putting pressure on the SPDC to enter into tripartite dialogue with the National League for Democracy and the ethnic nationalities;
- To the United Kingdom Department for International Development – to ensure that humanitarian assistance is provided to the Internally Displaced People.