

briefing

Burma

Visit to the Thailand-Burma Border 16-28 November 2007

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CHRISTIAN
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WORLDWIDE
VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS

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I. Executive Summary

The brutality of Burma's ruling military regime, known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), was brought to the attention of the world in September 2007, when the regime launched a severe crack down against tens of thousands of Buddhist monks and civilians who had participated in peaceful protests. The demonstrations were an expression of many years of deep-seated frustration among Burmese people at the regime's tyrannical rule, including the suppression of democracy and basic human rights and the gross mismanagement of Burma's economy. Sparked by dramatic rises in fuel prices, the nationwide protests broadened into a movement for democracy. The regime's response was brutal but characteristic. While the exact death toll is unknown, it is believed by reliable sources that hundreds of people were killed. According to the Assistance Association of Political Prisoners in Burma (AAPPB), at least 4,000 people were arrested, and while many have since been released, arrests continue to be made. A total of at least 2,000 political prisoners are in jail in Burma today.

The international community has responded to the crisis with increased attention at the United Nations Security Council, renewed efforts by the UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari to negotiate a dialogue between the regime and the democracy movement, and further sanctions imposed by the US and the European Union (EU). The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), however, while expressing concern about the situation, has failed to take any concrete measures to address the situation.

It is vital that the international community, and in particular China, India and ASEAN, recognise that the events of September 2007 were simply the tip of the iceberg. The military junta in Burma has been perpetrating gross violations of human rights, amounting to crimes against humanity, war crimes and attempted genocide, for 45 years. The violations committed by the SPDC against the country's ethnic nationalities, particularly the Karen, Karenni and Shan, have received far less international attention than the events of September 2007. Taken together, the catalogue of brutality by the SPDC over many years makes it one of the worst regimes in the world. While ultimately change can only come from within Burma, the international community must do all it possibly can to increase pressure on the SPDC to enter into meaningful tripartite dialogue with the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the ethnic nationalities, to cease its gross violation of human rights, and to move to a transition to federal democracy. The international community should also provide increased support to Burma's democracy movement, including financial and other assistance to indigenous human rights organisations working along Burma's borders, and humanitarian aid to the Internally Displaced People.

2. Recommendations

The SPDC continues to commit gross violations of human rights, amounting to crimes against humanity and war crimes and attempted genocide. The events of September 2007 brought the situation in Burma to the attention of the international community, but the momentum generated by that attention needs to be maintained. CSW welcomes the increased sanctions by the US and the EU, and the increased attention by the United Nations. CSW calls on the international community, including the UK, US, EU and UN:

- I. To monitor the implementation and enforcement of sanctions to ensure their effectiveness;

2. To call for the increased engagement of the UN Secretary-General himself in the efforts to initiate tripartite dialogue in Burma, including a visit by the Secretary-General personally to Burma as a matter of urgency;
3. To increase pressure on China, India and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), to work together with the UN to urge the SPDC to engage in meaningful tripartite dialogue with the NLD and ethnic nationalities;
4. To urge the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand to desist from providing economic support to the SPDC, and to use its influence to encourage tripartite dialogue;
5. To provide humanitarian aid to Internally Displaced People through cross-border mechanisms;
6. To provide financial support and expertise to indigenous pro-democracy, human rights and other civil society organisations working along Burma's borders.

3. About Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is an international human rights organisation specialising in religious freedom. With advocacy staff based in London, Brussels and Washington, DC, CSW has partners and affiliates in the UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, India, Sri Lanka, Norway, Denmark and France. CSW has been working on human rights issues in Burma for much of the past twenty years, making regular visits to the Karen, Karenni and Shan ethnic nationalities on the Thailand-Burma border, the Chin on the India-Burma border, and the Kachin on the Chin-Burma border. CSW funds two orphanages in refugee camps for Karen and Karenni, and supports relief for the Internally Displaced People through the Free Burma Rangers and Partners Relief and Development.

4. Purposes of Visit

1. To obtain first hand, up-to-date information and evidence of human rights violations and political developments in Burma;
2. To assess existing CSW-sponsored projects and future needs;
3. To express solidarity with the oppressed and persecuted peoples of Burma.

5. Personnel

Dr Martin Panter – President, CSW Australia
Benedict Rogers – Advocacy Officer, South Asia, CSW UK
Anomi Brunyius – CSW Australia
Samuel Coates – Deputy Editor, conservativehome.com

The delegation was accompanied from 16-22 November by Baroness (Caroline) Cox, Chief Executive of the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART) and Rev. David Thomas, Logistics Officer at HART. The delegation was then joined from 22-27 November by Clare Kenchington and Claire Simmons from St Mark's Church, Versailles.

6. Itinerary

CSW visited Shan and Karen Internally Displaced People (IDPs) inside Burma, and Karen and Karenni refugees along the Thai-Burmese border. CSW also met Burmese monks and civilians who fled the current crack down in Burma, and Kachin groups based in Thailand. The delegation also had meetings with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and indigenous Burmese pro-democracy and human rights organizations in Mae Hong Son, Maesot, Chiang Mai and Bangkok. CSW met leaders of the Karenni National Progressive

Party (KNPP), the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), the Karen National Union (KNU), the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP), the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners in Burma (AAPPB), the Asia-Pacific People's Partnership on Burma (APPPB), the Burma Relief Centre, the Free Burma Rangers, Partners Relief and Development, the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), and the Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN). CSW's Advocacy Officer for South Asia also traveled to Sri Lanka, where he met Burmese Buddhist monks who had participated in protests in Sri Lanka and are unable to return to Burma.

7. Human Rights Violations in Burma

The ruling military regime in Burma, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), continues to perpetrate gross violations of human rights throughout the country. Evidence obtained during this visit by CSW is consistent with evidence received on numerous previous visits, and with reports by the United Nations and other international human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

7.1. Karenni

CSW met Khu Oo Reh, Secretary 2 of the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP). Khu Oo Reh confirmed that fighting between the KNPP and the Burma Army is continuing in the northern and southern areas in Karenni State. According to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), over 81,000 people were living as IDPs in Karenni State in 2007, an increase from 79,300 in 2006¹. However, the number of people living in forced relocation sites decreased slightly, from 6,400 in 2006 to 4,800 in 2007, according to TBBC.

The SPDC's so-called "Roadmap to Democracy", including the National Convention and constitution-drafting process, is "just for show", according to Khu Oo Reh. "The SPDC is not making any progress at all," he said. The SPDC has succeeded in enticing more Karenni to join ceasefire groups such as the Karenni National People's Liberation Front (KNPLF), a break-away group from the KNPP now fighting alongside the Burma Army. The SPDC offers 4,000 kyats (\$2.50) to people who defect to the KNPLF, as part of its divide-and-rule strategy.

7.2. Shan

There are five IDP camps for Shan people along the Thai-Burmese border, with a total of 6,000 IDPs. CSW visited one Shan IDP camp inside Burma, and the delegation was able to interview several IDPs, all of whom are Buddhists.

7.2.1. A 16 year-old boy from a village in southern Shan State

He came to this IDP site in 2001. When he was five years old, Burma Army soldiers came to his village and took his father away as a porter. His father had to carry weapons for the army, but was given no food. He became weak and was unable to carry the loads, and wanted to escape. The soldiers killed him. Other villagers who had been taken as porters came back to inform the boy's mother. A few years later, when he was in Grade 7, his mother was working in the fields when Burma Army soldiers came and raped her, then killed her. He therefore had no parents, and had to stay with neighbours. The Shan State Army (South) came to the village, and agreed to take him to the IDP site. The journey took two months. "The Burma Army often came to our village, stole food – chicken, pork – and

¹ Thailand Burma Border Consortium, *Internal Displacement in Eastern Burma, 2007 Survey*, p.25

forced people to be porters for them. I don't want the SPDC to continue to oppress the people anymore. I want them to leave."

7.2.2. An 18 year-old boy, from a village in central Shan State

He came to this IDP site in 2001. His father sent him there in order to get a school education. Before he left, his elder brother, aged 19 at the time, was beaten by the Burma Army when they came to the village to steal two cows from him. The beating left him paralysed, as they broke his back. They set fire to the house. "I want to become a medic and to go and help my people in my village when I have finished school", he said.

7.2.3. A 56 year-old man ("Mr L"), from a village in southern Shan State

He came to this IDP site in April 2007. He left his village last year but was unable to come directly to the IDP camp. In May 2006, the Burma Army came to his village and asked him for seven cows. He apologised and said he could not give seven cows, but they did not accept his apology. The soldiers shot two cows, and his father demanded payment for them, so the soldiers took his father and jailed him for six months. They beat and tortured him in jail, including water torture using a bag of water placed over his head. He died 16 days after leaving jail. Then the Burma Army learned that Mr L was practising as a 'healer'/medic without any medical qualifications, approval or permission. They jailed him for four nights, and then he escaped. His wife has remained in jail since November last year. They have three children, aged 18, 15 and 13. The 18 year-old has gone to Thailand where she lives with his sister, and is working.

7.2.4. A 36 year-old man from, eastern Shan State

He arrived at this IDP site in March 2007, after he fled his village because of being forced to work as a porter. The Burma Army forced him to work as a porter for them, carrying loads of 30 kilos, gave him little food for six days, and when he could not walk anymore, they beat him about the head. After six days they beat him so badly that he is now blind in one eye, and left him in the jungle beside a roadside on the way to a village. The Shan State Army South (SSA-South) found him there and brought him to the IDP camp.

7.2.5. A 20 year-old man, from a village in Shan State

He arrived in the IDP camp in 2002, having walked for one month from his village 500km away. The Burma Army had forced his village to relocate, and had given him and other villages two days notice. They were also forced to work as porters for the Burma Army. They were warned that if they did not comply they would be shot. Only 12 people out of 100 in his village came with him. At least 10 villagers were killed and another 20 beaten severely with rifle butts. He escaped at night with some of his family, but he had to leave his elderly parents behind and has had no contact with them since.

7.2.6. A 38 year-old man from a village in western Shan State

In September 2004, his village was forcibly relocated. He was a history teacher in the village. Approximately 150 villagers were forced to join the Burma Army. All villagers were forced to work as porters for the army. If they were unable to carry the loads they were beaten, often very severely. Before he left, a 25 year old girl was taken from the village in March

2004 to army barracks, and never seen again. The village headman, aged 50, was killed as a warning to others not to disobey orders. He escaped and travelled for two months, walking between eight and 10 hours a day, to reach the border.

7.2.7. A 40 year-old man (“Mr A”), and his 42 year-old wife (“Mrs B”), from a village in southern Shan State

This couple arrived at the IDP camp in September 2006. In August 2006, Burma Army soldiers came to their village and demanded all their livestock, such as pigs and chickens. As their livestock represented their entire assets, Mr. L refused. The soldiers took him outside and beat him, then imprisoned him for 15 days. One night he asked the guards to allow him to go to the toilet, and he managed to run away. The prison guards shot at him but missed. The authorities went to his home the following day, tied his wife’s hands behind her back, put a rope around her neck and led her around the village like an animal. She was beaten repeatedly, and they completely destroyed their house. In the evening, Mr L came back to the village, found his wife, and immediately they set off for the border, a 15-day walk away.

There were three cases of abduction and rape by soldiers in his village in 2006. In a nearby village of Kung Gha, a 12 year-old girl was abducted and taken to the army headquarters in April 2006 where she was kept for one week. On her return home she told her mother she had been gang raped, and tragically died 15 days later, without any medical care.

7.2.8. A 17-year-old girl from Central Shan State:

In her own words:

‘SPDC military troops would often come to my village. The men would run away into hiding, as they were afraid the Army would take them and they would be forced to work as porters. One day, when I was 8 years old, the Army came, and my father could not run. The soldiers caught him and asked him where all the other men from the village were. They beat him and sent him to search the houses to find the other men to bring them to become porters. My Dad never came home again. [She started weeping]. They then forced the villagers to leave the village. My mother was pregnant. We walked for eight days to get to the next village. When we arrived, my Mum only lived for five days – then she died’. [At this, the girl ran out, crying].

7.2.9. A 16-year old girl from Central Shan State:

In her own words:

‘We were living in a very small village. My mother was not well and my father worked on the farm. SPDC troops came to the village and asked my Mum to find out where my Dad was. She agreed, so they took my Mum away and I was left alone. My Mum showed the soldiers the farm where my Dad was working. They took him and asked him if he had seen the Shan State Army (SSA). They beat him and arrested him. They also took my Mum. I never saw them again. I had to stay alone at home for three nights. When I asked the soldiers where my parents were, they told me they were already dead. They said they were dead because they supported the SSA. And they burnt the village. Then I saw an uncle who took me to the border and I was brought here.’

When asked what she would like to do once she finishes school, she replied that she would like to become a doctor or a nurse.

[Throughout the interview, there was virtually no eye contact, her head was bowed and afterwards she sat, looking immensely sad]

7.2.10. A 16-year old girl from Southern Shan State:

She was weeping as she spoke. In her own words:

'SPDC troops came to my village and asked for porters. My father was ill from a snake bite, so when they asked him, he said he could not go. They arrested him and beat him very badly. He was very shocked and he died in front of the house. I had one brother, but they took him to become a soldier and they took my mother away and she never came back. I have never seen my brother again. The soldiers took me and I had to work for one of their families, looking after their three children, cooking and washing clothes. I had to work very hard and I had to sleep outside, with only one blanket. This was in Rangoon. Two or three other children in the village were sold by the SPDC and the boys were taken by the Army to become soldiers. I also saw SPDC soldiers who wanted to adopt a five-month old baby. The parents did not want to agree to this, but the soldiers took the baby anyway. The mother cried so much that she became very ill and had to spend many months in hospital. She never saw her baby again. After my parents died, I stayed with an aunt for five or six months. I also saw my Auntie raped by SPDC soldiers. Her husband was not at home so they stayed at her house and raped her. She was very shy. She killed herself.'

[At this point, she broke down in tears].

After regaining some composure, she said she would like to be a journalist.

7.2.11. Interview with Seng Som Khur, leader of the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS)

CSW met the leader of the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), Seng Som Khur, and discussed the political, security and human rights situation in Shan State. The human rights situation is unchanged, he said. "The oppression continues. Just last week, our Shan and Burma Armies fought, and soldiers died, because the Burma Army ordered all the people to leave a village. In another they drove out more than 100 people and destroyed their farms in order to make room for the new nuclear power plant being built. The SPDC are buying equipment from Russia for this project, which has been going on already for three years. North Korea, also, is helping," he said. Although he said he did not know whether the nuclear plant was for military or energy purposes, he said the SPDC sells uranium to Russia, which is mined in the north of Shan State in Muang.

As a result of the SPDC's drive to develop energy sources, he said, "so many people are still suffering". In parts of Shan State, people are ordered to grow a particular plant which can be used to produce fuel. The impact of this is that people are unable to grow their own crops, and the soil becomes less fertile.

People are forced by the SPDC not to support Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD), but instead to express support for the new Constitution. If people fail to attend public rallies orchestrated by the regime in support of the constitution process, they are punished.

Since the military took power in a coup in 1962, there have been four significant massacres, Seng Som Khur said. The first was in 1974, following the death of former UN Secretary-General U Thant. More than 100 were killed and over 1,000 injured in a crackdown on demonstrations. The second uprising was in 1988, when over 3,000 people were killed during protests. The third was the assault on Aung San Suu Kyi and her convoy at Depayin and the massacre of her supporters in 2003. The fourth was the crack down in September 2007. According to Seng Som Khur, many monks from Shan State were killed in Rangoon; hundreds had been injured. Overall it is estimated that 300 monks from all over Burma were killed, and thousands arrested. An estimated 200 Shan monks were studying in Rangoon, and

at least 80 of them were killed. Following the demonstrations, monasteries were raided by the Burma Army, and many monks killed or arrested. Some monastery buildings were destroyed. “We estimate that anything between 100 and 200 Shan monks are still imprisoned. We do not know where they are. Many other Shan monks have fled back to Shan State, from Rangoon.”

Demonstrations took place in 16 townships in Shan State, according to Seng Som Khur. In Pakhotku at least 80 civilians were killed and 200 injured. The SPDC is now taking severe measures to ensure demonstrations do not happen again. Spies are active in every area, and it is extremely difficult for monks to travel to Rangoon. Civilians have been forced to participate in counter-demonstrations against the monks.

7.3. Karen

The TBBC estimates there to be 116,000 IDPs in Karen State in 2007, an increase from 99,300 in 2006². Currently the areas facing the most pressure are Toungoo, Papun and Nyaunglebin districts. The KNU expect a renewed offensive during the dry season.

CSW visited three IDP sites in Karen State. The first was Ei Htu Hta, established in April 2006. It has already become overcrowded, which is why the new camp, Oo Wei Hta, had to be established on 18 July, 2007. Oo Wei Hta is located one hour further along the Salween River from Ei Tu Hta, and has 402 IDPs. The third IDP camp was a location further south along the border.

Oo Wei Hta continues to receive new arrivals. Two families had arrived on 15 November 2007, just five days before our visit. They had already fled from their villages because they lived in a ‘Black Zone’ in Karen State. The SPDC designate areas ‘Black Zones’ if they are still controlled by the KNLA (Karen National Liberation Army) and ‘White Zones’ (those now under SPDC control). When SPDC soldiers attack villages in a Black Zone, they arrest the villagers, torture and kill them, for supporting the KNLA. They also shoot at the villagers and shells have landed on the villages. The new arrivals had fled to a hideout in the jungle. While hiding there, they tried to return to the village for food, but this was difficult and dangerous. They had young children and it was difficult to survive like this. Then the SPDC discovered their hideout, so they had to flee for their lives. It took them 10 days to walk here. Now, they are relieved to have food, but deeply worried about their future.

CSW interviewed several IDPs:

7.3.1. A 28 year-old man from a village in Toungoo District, Karen State

On 8 March 2006, Burma Army troops from LIB 48 forced the entire village of 40 families to move to a relocation site, along with all the other villages in the township. The soldiers set a deadline, and warned that anyone in the area after that date would be shot. Altogether 10 villages were forcibly relocated. Some villages had around 1,000 people. A new dam was being constructed in the area, which is why the villages were relocated.

Saw B spent over a year at the relocation site, before escaping on 8 August 2007 with his wife and three children, and four other families. He arrived at the IDP camp on 5 October 2007.

² Ibid.,

At the relocation site, situated two hours walk from his original village, no one was allowed to go outside. “We were kept there as if in a prison,” he said. “Whoever left was shot on the spot. Many were killed – at least two or three from each village. Many were arrested. But to stay there meant no job, no hope.” The site was guarded by 30 Burma Army soldiers.

Every day the Burma Army forced villagers at the relocation site to do forced labour, from 6am-4pm. “If you were not able to do it, you had to pay a fine of 3,000 kyats”. The Burma Army did not provide any food during the day. Villagers were forced to cut bamboo to build the army barracks. Soldiers regularly checked the work, and kicked villagers if they were not working well.

There was no clinic at the relocation site. To receive medical treatment, villagers had to go to a private clinic in the nearby town. If they were unable to pay, they could not receive treatment. There was a primary school, but the teachers only came three days a week.

Prior to the relocation, Burma Army soldiers used to come to his village twice a month from their camp one and a half hours walk away. In 2004, soldiers from LIB 75 commanded by Maung Maung Hlaing came and shot a man. They arrested Saw B and tied his hands behind his back. They burned down his house, and took him to an outpost where they held him, tied up, for one night. He was beaten and kicked. His wife had to pay 60,000 kyats for his release.

7.3.2. A 35 year-old man from a village in western Karen State

He arrived at the IDP camp in mid-November 2007 in a group of 19 people from five of the nine families who used to live in his village. They walked for one month. In 2006, they were forced to relocate from their village. Until that time, he had worked for a Karen farmer who owned land in the village. He earned 500 kyats (approximately 12p) per day. When the village was relocated, the villagers had to move to a location 10km away, next to a Burma Army camp. They were unable to work or farm, and instead had to provide forced labour for the military, carrying logs, ammunition and other supplies as porters. Five people from his village died from overwork or beatings by the soldiers. The Burma Army soldiers ate all their animals, and eventually they were left with no food, so they decided to flee at night. He said he believed the SPDC wished to kill all the Karen people. This was the fourth forced relocation he had faced since 1992. He felt he and his family could not face any more abuses of their human rights, or they would all be dead.

7.3.3. An elderly man from Than Taung Township:

In his own words:

‘I had to leave my village. I could not stay there any longer, as the SPDC soldiers were setting up a camp in the village. No-one stayed. We all had to flee. Six families came here. The SPDC did not kill anyone in our village, but one man from the next village was killed by them. We are farmers. We always lived in fear and we were always ready to run. Then, when we saw the SPDC approaching, we had to run and leave our land for the SPDC. We had to walk for 10 days to get here.’

7.3.4. A 52-year old Christian man from Northern Karen State arrived on October 4.

In his own words:

'We were forced to leave our village because of the SPDC's forced relocation plan. Their soldiers arrived in our village and told us we would have to leave in the next two days. Anyone who refused would be arrested, sent to jail and/or killed. We had to leave everything behind. We hid in the jungle to see whether it would be safe to return. Then we saw the SPDC burn our homes and destroy our church. We then knew we could not stay or we would be killed. We had to go a Relocation Site in 'The Plain'. We were there for a year. Conditions there were very bad and we had to do forced labour for the SPDC, working as porters or digging trenches. If we tried to go back to our village to collect some food, and if we were seen by the SPDC, they would shoot us. Two villagers were caught trying to go back to their village and we never saw them again. We never knew what happened to them. It took us a month to walk here, because we had to hide and to sleep in the jungle and we had to wait until it was safe to cross roads, as SPDC soldiers were driving in cars. Some of us, especially the children, became ill on the way – but no-one died. We are farmers, but here have no land to farm. We are totally dependent on other people.'

7.3.5. Interview with Padoh Ba Thin Sein, President of the Karen National Union (KNU); General Tamlabaw, Vice-President of the KNU; Padoh Mahn Sha, General Secretary of the KNU, and other members of the KNU Executive Committee.

The delegation discussed the political, security and human rights situation with the KNU leadership. The KNU President, Padoh Ba Thin Sein, expressed concern that the UN Secretary-General's report on child rights in Burma, issued on 23 November 2007, appeared to implicate the KNU in the use of child soldiers. The KNU has issued a statement, dated 24 November 2007, clarifying their position, confirming that since 2003 it has had an official policy banning the use of child soldiers under the age of 18, and has instructed all KNLA soldiers to follow the directive and enforce the ban. The KNU has also signed the Deeds of Commitment to cease the recruitment and use of children. In contrast, the SPDC continues to forcibly recruit children as young as eight or nine years old, and has an estimated 70,000 child soldiers in the Burma Army.

7.4. Defectors

CSW interviewed two young men who had been forcibly recruited into the Burma Army and have recently escaped to the Thai-Burmese border.

7.4.1. Mr X, aged 22, from Irrawaddy District, Delta, Burma – a Buddhist

He arrived on the border a month ago. A year earlier, he had been stopped by the police in his home town, and forced to join the army. He was forced to do six months training before being sent to the border areas with LIB 590. He fled because he did not want to carry out orders to commit human rights violations. He said that he was aware that a lot of abuses were carried out, including torture, forced labour, extortion of money and food from villagers. The Burma Army soldiers described the ethnic nationalities as "Ngapwe", meaning "a dirty skin disease".

His training involved four-and-a-half months in Thathong District, Mon State, learning how to use guns, how to make landmines and other basic military training. He wanted to escape, but he dared not – he saw that when people tried to escape they were severely beaten.

In September 2007, 50 soldiers from LIB 590 were ordered to go to Rangoon to take part in the crackdown against the protests. He heard that they were ordered to shoot the civilian protestors, and he decided to flee because he did not want to carry out such an order. When he was told to go to Bago, he escaped.

In his battalion, 16 of the 75 soldiers were children. “There are a lot of child soldiers in the Burma Army,” he said. “I want to tell other soldiers who have been forced to join the army to flee if they have the chance. Don’t obey orders anymore.” Morale is very low in the army, even among ranking officers, he said, and many would like to defect.

7.4.2. Mr Y, aged 19, a Buddhist from Irrawaddy District

His mother was a shop keeper who sold alcohol. The Burma Army soldiers asked her for money, otherwise they said she should not sell alcohol. She argued with them, and the soldiers became angry. He was afraid that she would be severely punished, and so in order to help his mother, he agreed to join the army.

He joined LIB 590 and did four months training in Thatong, Mon State. He and Mr X often discussed their situation with each other and their desire to escape. However, they were aware of what could happen if they were caught escaping. One escapee was seriously beaten, and imprisoned for a month.

During the training, they were paid 10,500 kyats per month. After training, they were paid 13,000 kyats. However, they did not always receive their full salary – sometimes they received less than they were entitled. Even when they were paid, they were not given money – they were paid in vouchers which could only be used in army-run shops. From their salaries they had to pay for food, and for their uniform. A uniform cost 10,000 kyats. As a result, they were forced to demand food and other supplies from villagers.

Soldiers were regularly beaten, particularly with bamboo sticks. On the day of their escape, Mr Y was beaten by an officer. It is very likely that both he and Mr X would have been imprisoned later that day, they said.

They escaped, and walked for over a month, sleeping in Mon villages at night. They did not eat for a week. When they arrived at a Karen village, they asked the villagers for help. At first, the two boys were afraid the Karen would kill them. But the Karen Christians helped them. After 15 days, they met Karen soldiers who brought them to the border.

“I want to work ... I want to live life normally,” he said. “I want to earn money to send to my mother.” He was desperate to find out how his mother is, and wanted to make contact with her to let her know he was safe.

7.5. Burmese Buddhist Monks and civilians who participated in the September 2007 protest

7.5.1. Venerable X

Venerable X left Rangoon on 26 October 2007, a month after the regime's brutal crackdown on monks and civilian protestors began. He had been the Secretary of the Pahuzana Hitaya, a Buddhist monks' organisation established to motivate people to participate in the demonstrations. He had not previously been involved in political activities.

On 5 September, a small demonstration led by monks in Pakokku resulted in three monks being very brutally beaten by soldiers. The monks then gave the regime an ultimatum, demanding an apology by 18 September. The regime did not apologise, and so the monks launched a religious boycott, refusing to accept alms or perform religious ceremonies for members of the junta or their families. The religious boycott is continuing.

According to Venerable X, approximately 90 per cent of Burma's 400,000 monks took part in the movement in September. On 26 September, he was beaten with rubber sticks as he tried to protect an older monk. "I was surprised and shocked. I did not think the soldiers would beat monks. In Burma, religion is like a parent. The military beat their parents."

After 26 September, he went into hiding and was able to obtain medical treatment for his injured arm. He then escaped to the Thailand border.

Many monks who were jailed have now been released, he said, but have been sent back to their respective areas and have been forbidden from travelling. Travel to Rangoon or Mandalay by monks from other towns or cities is restricted, and monks in Rangoon and Mandalay cannot visit other monasteries.

"People in Burma are really angry. The regime has suppressed them very brutally. Inside peoples' minds they really want to do something to change this regime. Life is getting more difficult," he said. "But the SPDC has been weakened. The people really hate them now. The regime is still physically strong. It has guns. But it has no legitimacy or moral authority."

To bring down the regime, he says, will require greater unity, and particularly the support of government servants. "The reason the regime survives is because government workers have not joined the movement. We need to be able to get their support," he says.

Burma Army soldiers who carried out the crackdown were, he believes, given drugs. The reason soldiers did not disobey orders or defect in large numbers is, he explained, because if a soldier disobeys orders they are executed, so soldiers were fearful. The families of soldiers who disobey orders also suffer.

He urged the US and the EU to put pressure on China, India and ASEAN to work together to find a solution for Burma.

7.5.2. A man from south Okkalapa Township, Rangoon

He arrived on the border on 22 October, having taken part in a protest at Ngwe Kyar Wan monastery.

On 26 September, the monastery was raided at night by soldiers from LIB 77. Many monks were arrested and beaten. Due to the curfew people could not protest immediately, but on 27 September about 10 local people went to the monastery to demand to know what had happened to the monks. Tension grew between the people and the soldiers, and the soldiers ordered the crowd to disperse. The crowd grew to 10,000. The soldiers invoked Order 144, a law which prohibits the public gathering of more than five people, and said they had orders to shoot. The people were really angry. At 12 noon some people cut down a tree and placed it between the crowd and the soldiers. The soldiers fired tear gas and started beating people. Two people were beaten to death. The soldiers dragged the dead bodies into trucks, which angered the people more. Then the soldiers began shooting, and five people died. These five bodies were taken by people to hospital.

On 30 September the funeral of the five people who had been shot was held in a cemetery. But the families of the two who had been beaten to death and taken away in military trucks were not permitted to have the bodies back and were therefore unable to have a proper funeral.

The crackdown on 27 September took place in three locations with particular brutality: the Sule Pagoda in Rangoon, the No. 3 High School in Tamway township, and South Okkalapa Township. At the high school in Tamway township, a 15 year-old male student was shot in the forehead and killed. An NLD member was tortured to death in a detention centre in Mandalay, and when the family requested the body they were informed by the army that the body had already been cremated.

On 26 September a monastery in Myitkyina was raided, and the monks were brutally beaten. One died the next day in hospital.

The army used the Government Technology Institute near Insein as a detention centre. One detainee died due to lack of medical treatment and the denial of food and water.

During the protests, but before the crackdown began, the authorities placed agents, particularly local headmen, to report on the activities of participants in the protests and to note the names of participants. The authorities also took photographs of protestors and asked headmen and other sources to identify the protestors. As a result, many were arrested. However, the process took time and therefore some, like this man, were able to escape.

Informers are paid 3000 kyats (\$2) a day, dependent on providing information. In contrast, general workers (eg street sweepers, waiters etc) earn 1,500 kyats (\$1) a day. Informers tend to be people facing economic difficulties and therefore motivated by the need to earn extra money. Informers receive other benefits as well, such as being able to conduct illegal business. Traders coming to the Thai border are required to provide information to the authorities on the activities of groups in Maesot.

After the crackdown, the families of some of those who died held funeral ceremonies, but those who attended the funerals were then arrested.

On 13 October, he returned home and his wife informed him that the authorities had asked her where he was. Fortunately, he used to be a sailor and so it was not unusual for him to

be away from home for long periods of time. He went into hiding, as he could not stay at his own house, and then on 17 October he moved to another location. On 22 October he fled to Myawaddy and crossed the border into Thailand.

7.5.3. Venerable S

He arrived in Maesot on 12 November 2007, having fled from Rangoon to Pegu. The monasteries were raided in Pegu and he went into hiding, and then fled. The journey from Pegu to the Thai border took two days. Prior to 25 September he had no involvement in political activities.

In September he received a message from the monks in Pakokku, where the demonstrations started, and he copied and distributed leaflets to other monasteries. He then went to Pegu to help organise the monks' protests, and took part in a gathering at the Shwe Dagon Pagoda on 25 September.

On 26 September, he took part in protests in Rangoon which ended peacefully. The monks arranged to gather again after lunch on 26 September at the Shwe Dagon. However, that night many monasteries, including his own, were raided by soldiers, riot police, and the regime's civilian proxy militia organisations – the Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA) and Swan Ah Shin – and monks were beaten. His Abbot was arrested. During the raids, property was looted, Buddha statues broken, alms bowls kicked upside down and money was stolen. "The following day monks were left with nothing," he said.

On 27 September, he escaped from a raid and tried to hide with local people near the monastery. However, people informed him that military trucks and USDA were deployed in the area and the monastery was raided again. He knew he could not return to the monastery, and so he decided to escape to Pegu. He left Rangoon and arrived in Pegu in the afternoon of 27 September, after a two hour drive. He travelled in his monks' robes – while the authorities were not permitting monks to travel to Rangoon, they did not stop monks leaving Rangoon.

In Pegu, a large crowd was protesting and he joined them. The demonstrators stopped at the Shwe Modo pagoda, where protestors went inside and recited the "Metta Sutra" ("Loving Kindness") to everyone. Soldiers, riot police and USDA then surrounded them, and three military trucks blocked the road. They started to use tear gas, and he was beaten on his hands and ribs. He was sheltered by a senior monk after the demonstrations.

On 28 September, he came out to organise another protest of monks and civilians, and again the security forces used tear gas and beat the protestors. Fewer people joined the protest, and there was a very heavy military presence.

"I came out of Burma because we need help and advice for the suffering people of Burma. I want to tell the world what is happening. Religion is very important for human beings," he said. "The beating of monks in Burma threatens global peace. People in other parts of the world are responsible to protect the people of Burma, in the interests of peace and stability. Please recognise what is happening in Burma and try to increase pressure on the regime to resolve the situation peacefully. Please try to help the people who were injured. The monks will continue the religious boycott of the regime, together with the people of Burma."

He supports targeted sanctions against the regime. "Sanctions should be real sanctions. They need to be monitored to make sure they are being implemented. The profits of big business

never reach the people. The money only goes to the Generals and their friends. They do not do anything to benefit the people.”

7.5.4. An 88-Generation student from Rangoon

He arrived in April 2007 on the border. He was an 88 Generation student. Following the 1988 uprising, he joined the Democratic Party for a New Society, and became Vice-Chairman of the Rangoon Division. In 1989 he fled to the border, and arrived in Maesot in 1990 where he worked as a news reporter for the Burma Journal. However, in 1994 the SPDC launched a major offensive against the KNU and pressure on Burmese based in Maesot intensified. His wife was suffering heart failure, and so they decided to return to Burma. He was arrested at Myawaddy by Military Intelligence and detained for one and a half months, before being returned to Rangoon. He continued his education in Rangoon and established a small business.

Following the release of Min Ko Naing in 2004, they started to work together. He was involved in various campaigns including a signature campaign, a “White” campaign, and efforts to bridge the gap between the student generation of today and the 88 Generation. He was regularly detained by military intelligence, usually for about a month, but never charged or sentenced. His father was an NLD member, and the family was under close surveillance, and so he was advised to flee to the Thailand border.

On 25 November, an Organisation Committee for Monks Action was formed, he said, in order to continue the religious boycott and other action.

He is a physicist, and he claims he was regularly invited to courses in nuclear technology, including nuclear emergency protection. He believes the regime is trying to obtain nuclear technology and is receiving assistance from Russia. The regime also has close relations with Iran and North Korea. In Naypidaw there is a site between two mountains which he believes could be a nuclear facility. He knows a construction engineer who told him he had been involved in building a roof to cover the area between the two mountains.

7.5.5. Venerable K

In October 2003 the Abbot of his monastery in Rangoon started speaking out about the conditions of the people in Burma, and was sentenced to 25 years in jail with hard labour. Venerable K organised a religious boycott, refused to accept alms or food from anyone in the military. Another young monk from his monastery distributed pro-democracy leaflets, and was arrested and sentenced to 19 years in jail. Venerable K was told he would be arrested, and so he fled to the border.

In 2006, he joined a protest at the Burmese Embassy in Bangkok on Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday. In January 2007, he staged a “Peace Walk” from Bangkok to Maesot, which took one month. Upon arrival in Maesot, he was arrested and sent to No Po refugee camp, 100km west of Umphang. The Thai authorities reportedly ordered local Buddhists not to have any contact with him.

7.6. Kachin

CSW met representatives of several Kachin organisations, based in Thailand. This follows two visits made by CSW to the Kachin on the China-Burma border. According to these Kachin groups, the SPDC is pursuing a policy of slow, systematic genocide. The Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) has had a ceasefire with the SPDC since 1994. As a result, the Kachin are not experiencing the same extensive, overt violence from the Burma Army as the Karen, Karenni and Shan, in terms of the destruction of villages and mass displacement of civilians. However, the SPDC continues to oppress the Kachin, through the widespread use of forced labor, forced relocation, rape and religious persecution, and through more subtle, covert and indirect means. For example, due to the regime's lack of investment in education and economic opportunities, and the deliberate distribution of narcotics, thousands of young Kachin have become addicted to drugs. Since 1997, according to Kachin sources based on research from international NGOs, over 100,000 young Kachins have died from HIV/AIDS and drug-related causes.

Poverty and economic deprivation in Kachin State is widespread. People in Kachin State live on an average income of 1,500 kyats (\$1) a day. According to Kachin sources, basic food supplies and household goods are virtually unaffordable. For example:

- A kilo of rice (in 8 condensed milk cans) costs over 1,000 kyats
- One egg costs 100 kyats;
- One pineapple costs 300 kyats;
- A bunch of bananas costs 600 kyats;
- 1.6kg (a "viss") of pork costs 6,000 kyats;
- 1.6kg (a "viss") of chicken costs 3,000-4,000 kyats;
- A longyi costs 2,00 kyats
- A plain blouse costs 3,000 kyats

8. Refugees in Thailand

8.1. Karenni

The Karenni have two camps in Thailand with a total of 23,000 people and an estimated 4,600 families. Camp 1 currently has 19,000 refugees, while Camp 2 has 4,000. CSW was unable to access the camps themselves, but the delegation met the Karenni Refugee Committee (KnRC) at a location near the camps. CSW also met Meredith Nunu, who runs a children's home in one of the camps, supported by CSW-Australia and CSW-UK, and some of the children in her care.

This year, so far, there have been 350 new arrivals in the camps, according to the KnRC. The flow of new arrivals fleeing Karenni State to Thailand has been slow due to the rainy season, but the KnRC expects the numbers to rise during the dry season. New arrivals are not being registered by the UN, as official Thai policy is not to permit any new arrivals to cross the border. In August 2007, it was reported that 10 new arrivals were deported back across the border into Burma.

Refugees face tighter restriction on movement outside the camps. Inside the camps, education is only available up to Grade 10. The opportunities for young people in the camp are extremely limited. There are 26 places on a leadership programme run in the camp, but otherwise no opportunities for further or higher education. Depression is widespread, and there have been several suicides. The suicide rate among 20-40 year-olds is increasing.

CSW discussed the resettlement programme with the KnRC. Between 2005 and 2007, 769 people have been resettled from the Karenni camps to third countries. According to the KnRC, 522 Karenni have been resettled to Finland; 80 to Australia; 74 to New Zealand; 26 to the USA; 15 to Sweden; 9 to Norway; 8 to Canada.

8.2. Karen

CSW visited Mae La refugee camp and attended a service in the Baptist church led by Rev. Dr. Simon. We discussed the resettlement programme, and learned that a large number of Chin and Kachin refugees have arrived in the camp, hoping to be eligible for third-country resettlement.

9. Conclusions

The human rights situation in Burma is one of the most desperate in the world, and requires urgent attention. The SPDC has been given numerous opportunities by the international community, including the UN, to enter into meaningful dialogue and reform, and has failed to do so. International pressure must be urgently increased and intensified, to bring a political solution to Burma's crisis. If the allegations that Burma is seeking to develop nuclear resources are true, whether it be for energy or for military purposes, then the urgency of the situation is even greater. The international community should remember the words of Burma's democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, and respond to the question she poses: "The dream of a society ruled by kindness, reason and justice is a dream as old as civilised man. Does it have to be an impossible dream?"