

could not begin until late 1996. Early on, the KNU asked for suspension of military activities, cessation of human rights violations and meeting with the media during the talks. The SLORC turned the KNU's requests down and instead demanded that the KNU enter the legal fold, renounce armed resistance line and promise to lay down arms one day, before any talks on cease-fire began. In a one-year period, 4 formal rounds of talks took place. The talks were essentially exploratory in nature. The KNU found out that after a cease-fire agreement, it would not be allowed any political activity, administrative activity or freedom of movement. To enter the 'Legal fold' meant to accept the SLORC as a legal entity and submit to its repressive rule.

At the 4th round of talks in November 1996, the KNU rejected the pre-conditions, but expressed its willingness to continue the talks with a view to resolving problems by peaceful means and establishing lasting peace. The KNU repeated its willingness to continue talks, through the mediators who came to the KNU headquarters at the end of January 1997. However, the SLORC launched a major offensive against all the KNU areas, beginning from the middle of February 1997. In the face of overwhelming superior number, the KNU had to abandon all permanent positions. As a result of massive human rights violations and extreme atrocities coming together with the offensive, more than 30,000 Karen had to flee into Thailand for refuge, increasing the number of Karen refugees in Thailand to nearly 100,000. More than 2,000 villages were destroyed. An estimated 50,000 were trapped or remained in hiding, inside. About 20,000 were forcibly relocated.

Present Situation & Initiative

The SLORC's name change to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), in November 1997, was an attempt by the military junta to enhance its image internationally, after becoming an ASEAN member. The dismissal of most of the previous junta members came as a result of the intensification of power struggle between the side, that wanted to appear sophisticated, and the other which was interested only in increasing personal power and wealth.

The SPDC remains to be the same hard-lined military dictatorship, with its policies and pro-

grams based on fascist and militarist ideologies. Force, aggression and war are its main tools for achieving its objectives and maintaining itself in power. It continues to practice forced buying of the staple rice, uses forced labor for its development projects, for feeding its troops and in its military operations. Its troops continue to perpetrate human rights violations of forced relocation, arbitrary arrests, torture, extra-judicial executions, intimidation, rape of women, extortion of money, looting, destruction of homes, villages and means of livelihood, and desecration of places of worship, on ethnic and sometimes on religious grounds. These violations of human rights are a daily occurrence in the rural areas of the ethnic Shan, Karenni, Karen and Mon States. The populations living even in the cease-fire areas are not spared.

Every year since 1992, Special Rapporteurs of the UN Human Rights Commission on Burma deplore these massive violations of human rights. However, the military junta, either makes a blanket denial or just says that it is an internal affair, in which the UN Human Rights Commission has no business to interfere. The SPDC has always been insufficient in budget to properly maintain its monster army reportedly to be over 400,000 strong now, and it is allowing its army to live off the population, as a matter of policy. It does not care about the destruction of villages and means of livelihood, and uprooting the population as a result of its callous policy of denying the ethnic rebels, at all cost and by all available means, sources of information, income, food supply and communication. The wholesale destruction was done also on purpose, in line with the SPDC's undeclared policy of ethnic cleansing.

The ethnic forces and pro-democracy groups on the Thai-Burma border are united and committed to struggle on for human rights, peaceful resolution of conflicts, the establishment of just and lasting peace, freedom and democracy. The divide-and-crush policy of the SPDC has temporarily weakened the strength of the ethnic resistance forces to a certain extent, but it will have no lasting effect. After the surrender of Khun Sa, who is believed to have been working as an undercover agent for the military dictatorship, the divided Shans are now re-grouping to unitedly carry on the struggle. The Karenni people vow not to be duped into signing a sham cease-fire agreement again.